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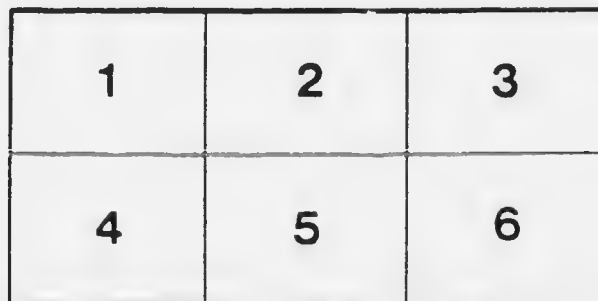
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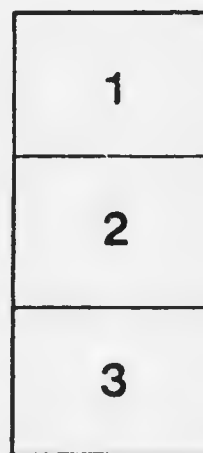
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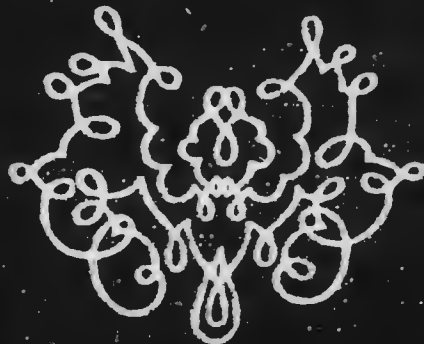
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THE WATERS
OF JORDAN
H. A. VACHELL





THE WATERS OF JORDAN



854

THE WATERS OF JORDAN

BY HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

AUTHOR OF "HER SON," "THE HILL," "BROTHERS," ETC.



TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS

1909

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THE WATERS OF JORDAN

CHAPTER I

CHARTERIS gave a last glance at the room wherein he had suffered so acutely—a suffering rigidly suppressed during three weeks. Even now, when he stood alone, disregarded by a few officials and attendants, his face retained its expression of impassivity, the “callous indifference” duly chronicled by the reporters. He had been racked in this torture-chamber, which outwardly presented so smug and conventional an appearance—pulled to pieces, branded, pilloried; and this for the sake of a woman whom once he had loved, but who had never loved him, as the evidence abundantly proved.

To-day the decree had been delivered; within six months it would be made absolute, unless the King's Proctor intervened. Considering this, and all it implied, Charteris caught the eye of his chief inquisitor, McAllister, K.C., hurrying off to the club of which Charteris was also a member.

The great man nodded genially. He looked

human. When his victim and he next met—probably at a bridge-table—they would talk with enthusiasm about dry-fly-fishing and deer-stalking. And the judge—that grave and learned signor, so impeccable of appearance, whose relentless summing-up had presented a kinsman as a blackguard and a bounder—would not he, even he, the expression and epitome of law human and divine, come up to Charteris in the paddock at Sandown, or elsewhere, and as likely as not ask for a tip? On a racecourse his lordship was no better than anybody else.

An official delivered a telegram.

“Ought to have reached you before, sir,” he said respectfully.

Charteris caught the subservient inflection, and smiled. Everything had been taken from him except his income. His gold might be tarnished, but it remained gold. He tore open the envelope:

“Waiting for you at your flat.—EDWARD.”

Edward Charteris was his half-brother, the head of the family, a man nearly twenty years his senior, whom nobody, not even his wife, ventured to address as “Ted” or “Teddie.” He lived at Saffron Charteris, in Suffolk, a moated Elizabethan manor-house; and he was said to manage other folks’ business more successfully than his own. Charteris had enormous respect for Edward, never warming into affection. In Edward he acclaimed great qualities: devotion to what Edward conceived

to be duty, a cut-and-dried code of ethics, a strenuous belief in himself, in his family (which had flourished since the Heptarchy), in the Church of England, and in the Conservative Party.

Their father—let us speak of him as the Squire—married: first, a lady who represented some outlying coverts and a thousand acres of arable land, to-day much depreciated in value. Her full-length portrait hangs in the hall at Saffron Charteris; no stranger looks at it twice. The Squire married his second wife—so said the gossips—for love; but she also was an heiress, the only child of a brewer. She had beauty and charm, and we shall see her portrait presently. The Squire's elder sisters, with many shakings of early-Victorian ringlets, pronounced her pleasure-loving and frivolous: an amazing example of the unexpected, inasmuch as her upbringing had been puritanically strict. Till she married she had never been in a theatre or a ballroom.

There was a story, too, of an infatuation for her father's secretary, despatched to Timbuctoo, whence he had not returned. It is idle to ask why she married the Squire, a middle-aged man, stuck fast in Suffolk clay, surrounded by a moat spanned by a drawbridge, lifted every night. The Squire, to be sure, was masterful, a strong, handsome, ruddy Englishman; he bore a romantic name, and he lived in an adorable house. Unhappily, she died, perhaps

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of disappointment, shortly after Hugo was born.

The brewer left a large fortune to his daughter's son, a fortune which doubled itself during the boy's minority.

Edward, it must be remembered, after his succession to Saffron Charteris, remained a poor man, the poorer because many-acred. Hugo, owning not a rood of land, was rich. Nor would Edward accept a farthing from Hugo when that young fellow came of age and offered to clear the estate of encumbrances. And since, again and again, money was offered and obstinately declined. Edward and Hugo had been educated at Eton. Edward's four sons were sent to a less famous and expensive school.

Hugo put Edward's telegram into his pocket, where it lay next to another almost similarly worded :

"I shall wait for you at my flat.—ANGELA."

Edward was a man of few words ; Angela Tempest a lady of many. Hugo decided to see Edward first. He walked out of the courtroom, along the stone-flagged passage, and into the thickening fog of a bleak November afternoon. Passing the small door to the right of the central entrance, the door through which, after mounting an interminable circular staircase, you gain access to the galleries, Hugo found a group of persons assembled. He felt their sharp eyes piercing the fog, trying to pierce also the outer

crust of the man whom the Yellow papers stigmatized as black as the ace of spades.

"He don't care a tinker's curse," muttered a girl in a large "picture" hat.

Her companion peered impudently into Hugo's face; he could see the paint on her cheeks.

"Why should he give himself away to us?" she demanded hoarsely.

Her shrewd, beady eyes met Hugo's glance in a flash of interrogation. "Thank you," said Hugo in her ear.

Pushing on, he heard some hisses and half a dozen threatening murmurs. An impulse seized him to turn and confront them, to say what he thought of ghouls who batten upon the dead lives of fellow-creatures.

Day after day these people had waited for hours, as playgoers wait outside the pit of some popular theatre, to see him vivisected. And in the private gallery to the left of the judgment-seat—the gallery to which the friends of those in authority had access—Hugo had recognized men with whom he had shot and hunted, women with whom he had danced. He had known one great lady very intimately as a child. She had adored him, as children do adore some young fellow who is better and kinder and handsomer than anyone else. How could *she* come to see him rolled in the mire? The groundlings knew no better, but the others, his friends, could he shake them by the hand again?

Passing St. Clement Dane's, the fog grew thicker, and the light from the lamps flared fitfully. The Strand was more crowded than usual, as Charteris looked in vain for an empty hansom. A chill breeze, sweeping up from the river, reminded him that his feet and hands were freezingly cold, while his head seemed to be in flames. He decided to walk home to his flat overlooking Hyde Park, where Edward was awaiting him.

As he walked he heard his name on the lips of the newsboys: "Hextra speshul! Tempest divorce case! Verdict! Portrait of the correspondent!"

One imp thrust his wares within a few inches of Hugo's nose with a raucous "'Ere y'are! One 'a'penny!" To silence importunity Charteris bought a paper. The boy stared at him admiringly, recognizing the toff, the real sport, who never asked for change. His grimy paw closed over sixpence; his sharp eyes twinkled as Hugo quickened his pace.

"Thank ye, sir. Ye've got a tanner's worth this time!"

At the next lamp-post Hugo glanced at his portrait with grim satisfaction, for walking down the Strand he had been conscious that he might be recognized. Nobody would recognize him from this. He smiled derisively, reflecting that the "portrait" represented quite adequately the public conception of him. Certainly he looked what the vast majority of his fellow-

countrymen believed him to be—the biggest blackguard in England.

A few minutes later he was in Pall Mall approaching the Wayfarers' Club. Coming down the stone steps, slowly pulling on his gloves, a tall, thin man, with a keen, kindly face, saw Charteris, and drew himself up rather stiffly. Both men nodded simultaneously, hesitated for an appreciable moment, and went their ways in opposite directions. Hugo walked on with his head in the air; the other looked back twice. "He nearly cut me," Hugo was saying to himself. "Ought I to have spoken?" was the insistent thought of the other; for Hugo and he had been friends at Eton and Oxford and afterwards, although of late the friendship had cooled somewhat, lacking the friction of constant intercourse.

Farther down, Hugo encountered a second man. This fellow was highly esteemed as "one of the best," a thruster in the pursuit of foxes and pleasure, a big, red-faced, heavy-jowled, pouter-breasted Major of Lancers, a son of Venus and Mars, who had never shirked a battle or a bottle, and, as he put it, "had done himself top-hole" ever since he joined his regiment.

This splendid person greeted Hugo with boisterous affection as "Old Sport." Hugo was entreated to dine, do a show, and sup—make a memorable night of it, in short.

"Any fool can see you want buckin' up, my boy."

"I am late for an appointment," said Hugo. "You are very kind, but——"

The big fellow winked knowingly.

"Of course," he said. "I might have guessed that. Well, she'll buck you up. By-by! Your own pals are with you to a man!"

His own pals?

The question bit deep. The Major had spoken with conviction, with finality. He, and innumerable others like him, were Hugo's pals now. How had it come to pass? By what imperceptible process had he lost the friendship of the kindly-faced Wayfarer, and gained instead the patronizing goodwill of this swash-buckler? And if the Wayfarer had asked him to dine, would he have refused?

When he reached his flat, Pixton, his servant, was awaiting him. The man had a pale, wooden, inscrutable face, thin lips, and a pessimistic expression, due to chronic dyspepsia. Pixton came from Saffron Charteris, one of Edward's "people," the son, indeed, of the head game-keeper. Hugo had taken him and trained him because he provoked pleasant memories, some of them connected with ferrets. Pixton, once a slip of a lad, now weighed fourteen stone. Hugo was never able to determine whether or not Pixton preferred London to Saffron Charteris.

Whenever he said, in his pleasant, genial voice, "I say, Pixton, don't you wish we were boys again, standing outside the Terrace Wood, on a frosty morning, and bunnies bolting—eh?"

always the placid Pixton would reply, "Sometimes I do, Mr. Hugo, and sometimes I don't."

As Pixton came forward Hugo said lightly: "It's all over, Pixton—thank goodness!"

Pixton replied in ominous tones: "Mr. Edward is here, sir."

"I know."

"And Mrs. Charteris."

"Mrs. Charteris?" repeated Hugo. He looked astonished, but his face grew brighter. Edward's wife had always stood stoutly by him, a true friend: more, a sister. The mere mention of her name made his blood circulate quicker. None the less he was sensible of a shock; he was unprepared to meet this simple, sweet creature; he shrank from taking her kind hand; he wondered if he could return her ingenuous glance. What must she think of him? For the second time that afternoon he tried to picture himself as he appeared to others whose good opinion he had once enjoyed. That confounded Wayfarer, for instance, turned aside, not because there was any taint of the Pharisee in him, but for the unanswerable reason that Hugo had changed, not he. Cynthia, too, would never change: the old, pleasant intercourse with her could not be renewed. She would look at him with sympathy and tenderness, with a compassion shining through tears, but she would see the scarlet letter flaming upon his heart, as it flamed upon the dress of Hester Prynne. Why had she come?

CHAPTER II

"I SHALL speak out—I shall speak out very plainly."

Thus Edward to his wife at the moment when Hugo was passing the Wayfarers' Club. Cynthia Charteris nodded, putting out her delicate hands to the fire. She had the air of being slightly chilled as she sat close to the fender, rather huddled up, not at ease, as she ought to have been in such a comfortable chair. Edward stood upon the hearthrug, looking down upon her with angry, slightly congested eyes. He very seldom allowed himself the luxury of any excitement.

"Will it do any good?" she said doubtfully. She put her hands nearer to the fire as she spoke.

"You are cold? To me this room is simply stifling. It must be over sixty-five degrees."

Mrs. Charteris smiled faintly. Was it worth while to explain that what excited and heated him might well have the contrary effect on her? And, besides, he was the sort of man who could never be made to understand that women register heat and cold in defiance of thermometers.

She said nothing, and looked at the room.

Some of the furniture had been of her own choosing, but the finer bits, and the arrangement of the whole, she knew to be the expression of Angela Tempest's unerring taste. Cynthia had persuaded Hugo to buy the carpet, a genuine Aubusson. What fun they had had haggling over the price with the dealer! In the glazed Chippendale bookcase she could see half a dozen books given to him by her shortly after he left Oxford; and the bookcase itself had been found in a curiosity-shop in Bury St. Edmunds. They had lunched together afterwards at the Angel Inn. Cynthia never bought pretty things for herself, because Saffron Charteris was full of furniture, some good, some excruciatingly bad, good and bad alike being sacrosanct to Edward, and, standing side by side as they had always stood, significant in Cynthia's eyes of the good and evil in all ancient houses and systems.

There were some frightful gilt cornices in the long saloon, for instance. Cynthia, as a bride, had entreated Edward to take them down. He had refused, not churlishly, but absolutely, on the plea that his mother had placed them there. Most of the silver, too, was of the best Georgian period, but an early-Victorian urn, detestably florid, dominated the breakfast-table. The lady who represented outlying coverts bought it, and the cornices, and other solid, indestructible monstrosities. If, poor thing! she was indeed

married with no more soul-inspiring motive than to improve the shooting, she truly had her revenge, albeit an unpremeditated one.

In Hugo's sitting-room, with one notable exception, there was nothing to offend, nothing to mar the harmony of the general scheme of decoration. The exception was a large framed photograph: the portrait of the lady upon whose account Edward had declared his intention of speaking out: the lady whose name was in the mouths of men and women and newsboys, especially newsboys. Cynthia had looked at the pretty, sparkling face once, as soon as she entered the room. She never glanced at it again, being one of those who, by temperament, resolutely decline to contemplate what exasperates them. Edward, on the other hand, scowled at it repeatedly. This made him warm, uncomfortably warm—an effect, indeed, natural enough, for Angela Tempest was undeniably a source of heat—so warm that he wiped his forehead and opened the window.

"And he leaves that hanging there! Is he a moral idiot?"

Edward indicated a full-length portrait hanging above the mantelpiece, the portrait of Hugo's mother, of which mention has been made. It was one of Pynsent's earliest and best pictures—admirably drawn, subtly conceived, masterly in every touch—the counterfeit presentment of a young woman painted by a youthful genius. Youth informed it, and youth's colouring, gay,

vivid, seizing. Pynsent, I am told, admits now that it was a happy fluke. Instinctively—for he knew nothing of the truth—he had posed this adorable creature against a dark and sombre background. He had insisted upon her wearing a black dress, as if to emphasize the contrast between heredity and environment; for who could doubt that she was sprung from some laughter-loving, pleasure-seeking race, although with incredible recklessness she had selected a Nonconformist brewer for a father? Her mother, however, was Irish, and the psychologists will hasten to assure us that, being the only child of a marriage of convenience, she had not taken after her sire. The portrait was painted at the time of her marriage. Already disappointment had touched her lightly, but the artist seemed to have divined the future—an airy sprite imprisoned in Cimmerian darkness, doomed to wither and die prematurely.

Cynthia glanced at the picture. She had great quickness of perception, but her thoughts had so far outstripped her husband's that she failed to understand him.

"A moral idiot?" she repeated.

"That and that in the same room." He pointed a denunciatory forefinger at the large photograph.

"But she died when Hugo was a baby."

"I don't care; she was his mother. It's a sort of sacrilege. When I think of my own dear mother——"

A vision of his own dear mother assailed Cynthia. Cornices, crinoline, a preposterous urn, antimacassars, hair worn in Madonna bandeaux, a large cameo brooch——!

Pixton came to the rescue with the tea-things. Edward looked at him with interest. In a sense Pixton saved the situation. He came from Saffron Charteris; he was eminently respectable; he had the air of an archdeacon suffering from biliousness.

"You look dev'lish seedy, Pixton, bad colour."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"And I don't wonder at it."

He surveyed Pixton gloomily, but with a sense of satisfaction. Pixton was showing proper feeling. A complexion the colour of gruel proclaimed, in Edward's eyes, rather a good heart than a bad stomach.

"You can shut the window, Pixton."

Pixton did so, and silently withdrew. Cynthia poured out the tea. The subtle change in the atmosphere affected her also. Her voice was more natural when she said:

"Do sit down, Edward, and drink your tea."

"You would drink tea if the skies were falling."

"Why not?"

"No tea for me. I shall ask Hugo for a small whisky-and-soda if he agrees to do the right thing."

"The right thing?"

"He must come back with us to Saffron Charteris."

"And you will raise the drawbridge?"

"My dear, I sometimes wish you would take serious things more seriously. Hugo must let this scandal die down."

"If he went abroad——"

"Of course, I thought of that. But our standing by him will help. People will say that matters were not as bad as they seemed. Hugo has taken the odium upon his own shoulders, but, reading between the lines of the evidence, the men at least would know——"

"And the women. Give us credit for some perception."

"Cynthia, you didn't read all the evidence?"

"Yes, I did, every word."

"I thought you loathed that sort of thing."

"I loathe it now even more than I did before."

Her voice had gained a certain strength. Perhaps tea had fortified her determination to say something too long withheld. She eyed Edward nervously, as she continued slowly: "Don't you think you ought to leave Hugo alone?"

"What!"

"I know all you would say, and——"

"Go on!"

"If you would slip off to your club and let me say it."

"You? This is pitch, and I won't have you touch it. You came here against my wish."

I warned you that I was not going to mince my words."

"That is why I came."

Edward cleared his throat.

"I shan't be hard on him if he behaves reasonably."

"And if he behaves—unreasonably?"

"Then I wash my hands of him."

"You mustn't be too hard with her looking on."

Again they looked at the portrait of Hugo's mother. Out of her soft, grey-blue eyes shone a poignant eagerness and expectancy, a touching appeal from weakness to strength.

"I shall do my duty, Cynthia."

"Shush-h-h!" she whispered. "He is coming."

The brothers shook hands very solemnly. Cynthia offered her cheek to the sinner. He had grace enough to kiss her hand instead, an abstinence which mollified Edward and brought a faint blush to the lady's cheeks.

"You got my wire," said Edward.

"Oh yes. It was very good of you to come up. Cynthia is an angel."

His charming voice, with its easy, agreeable inflections, brought a frown to Edward's narrow but lofty brow. As a boy Hugo had possessed this disarming voice and manner, this self-effacing smile, which vanquished even headmasters. The special jury, however, and his lordship, and McAllister, K.C., had heard a very different voice; and of the smile not a glimmer had been vouchsafed to them.

"I'm not going to beat about the bush," said Edward ponderously. "I want a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. What are you going to do?"

Cynthia had sat down; the brothers remained standing. It was not easy to believe that they were brothers. The difference in age, temperament, physique, voice, was very great. Edward was dark, black-avised, like most of the males of his family; Hugo had his mother's colouring. And yet the discerning eye might perceive points of resemblance: a slightly obstinate carriage of the chin; the same long, finely-shaped thumbs; the thick, waving hair, which is said to indicate superabundant vitality.

"What am I going to do?" Hugo repeated quietly. "Well, you see, that depends."

"It depends on you."

"Pardon me, it depends"—he paused for a moment—"on Mrs. Tempest."

"Are you going to marry that woman?"

"Edward!"

The faint protest reached Hugo's ears, not Edward's. In times of domestic stress Edward exhibited a slight deafness: the most convenient infirmity in the world.

"This afternoo:n I shall ask Mrs. Tempest to become my wife as soon as the decree is made absolute."

"I knew it!" groaned Edward.

"I can do neither more nor less."

"Look here: I—I mean we—she insisted on

coming, much against my will—we have come up to town to ask you——”

“To entreat you——”

“Not to make an absolute idiot of yourself.”

“You are very kind,” said Hugo.

“Kindness be d——d! When I have to do a thing, I do it, that’s all.”

“We are alike in that, Edward.”

“I’m not going into details, especially before her. You’ve had a peppering. They shot you sitting—shot you to bits. I’m amazed to see you looking as well as you do. Poor Pixton——”

“Pixton d——s stout, and takes no exercise.”

“Pixton is a good, faithful servant. Let me finish! You ought to go to ground.”

“A good many people think that.” Hugo laughed grimly. Lethal chambers had been suggested for such as he.

“I mean you ought to lie low for a bit: let the clouds roll by. From the first I’ve told Cynthia that you were more fool than knave.”

“Thanks.”

“Not at all. We’re not knaves. We have our faults, but we’re not knaves. Then, again, you’ve wild Irish blood in your veins.”

“Do you hold my mother responsible for what I’ve done?”

“If your mother were here——”

“Perhaps she is here. Who knows?”

This was the last straw. To Edward such

a flippant, heartless interruption meant that moral idiocy at which he had already hinted. He glanced at the large framed photograph, shaking his head, protruding his lower lip; wrinkled amazement distorted his face. Hugo read him easily.

"Look here," he said. "You don't understand. I'm not joking. If my mother is here, she knows all—you don't."

"As head of the family, I claim a right to be told anything I ought to know which I don't know."

Hugo exhibited the first signs of impatience.

"There are certain things which can't be told. You're right. I'm a fool. More fool than knave, perhaps, although that is not quite clear to me. I've made a mess of my life—and I know it—I mean, I'm beginning to know it. When I left the court-room this afternoon I thought the worst was over. It isn't. And I've done you an injury—disgraced the name which is yours and"—he looked at Cynthia—"hers. No man had ever better chances. Well, I'm sorry; you must always believe that."

"Always," said Cynthia. The tears were in her eyes.

"If you're really sorry," said Edward, "come home with us, and begin again."

Hugo glanced from husband to wife. The only home he had ever known belonged to them. The very word caught at his heart-strings. Then he said heavily: "I am to

choose between her"—he glanced at the photograph—"and you."

"Yes," said Edward. "Between her and us."

"She is waiting for me now."

"You choose her?"

"Yes."

Cynthia rose quickly and glided between the brothers. Edward was about to explode: fulminating interjections crackled on his lips. Cynthia held up her finger, imposing silence; then she turned to Hugo, holding out both her hands.

"Hugo, dear Hugo, if you loved her, if she loved you, I would say nothing, not one word. But you don't love her, do you?" He was silent. "And from a mistaken idea of honour you are going to commit suicide. Oh, it amounts to that."

"She needs me," muttered Hugo. He was very pale.

"Pooh!" said Edward. "She needs your money, not you. That's the brutal truth."

"If she needs my money, it is hers."

Edward's face was purple. He had fired his last shot.

"Come," he said sharply to his wife. "Let's get out of this; it makes me sick; no more wild-goose chases for me."

He hurried out of the room, muttering and stuttering with futile exasperation. Cynthia still looked entreatingly at Hugo.

"That this should be the end!" she sighed.

"You had better go," said Hugo hoarsely. He held out his hand, looking down, unable to meet the distress and sympathy in her kind eyes. Now, when it seemed possible that they might never meet again, a thousand memories of her rushed into his mind. He could see her plainly, vividly, as she appeared when she came home to Saffron Charteris as a bride. Hugo was then a boy of seven, and a child of imagination and sensibility. From some foolish nurse-girl he had absorbed a nightmare dread of this new sister-in-law, into whose hands, for good or ill, he was about to be delivered. He conceived her—let Heaven explain why!—to be old, ugly, cruel: something just short of a witch. At the psychological moment, prinked out in black velvet, with red silk stockings and a point-lace collar, placed by the butler in the centre of the great hall, his courage failed him. He fled to his room, crawled under the bed, and sobbed his heart out. And Cynthia, a girl of eighteen, haled him from his hiding-place, and kissed away his tears. And there and then they had sworn friendship. After that, for years, Cynthia had been the one bright, particular star in his heaven. One may hazard a shrewd guess that Cynthia herself was something of a child, and only too willing to become the sister and companion of an exceptionally fascinating boy. Edward from the first assumed the rôle of the heavy father. On Sunday mornings he would summon them peremp-

torily: "Come, children, we shall be late!" Later, when her own sons were born, the maternal instinct asserted itself. Hugo as Etonian asked for advice; as Oxonian he sometimes deigned to take it. She was the confidante of his innocent love affairs, which began when he attained the ripe age of nine! She hunted and fished with him, and taught him to play lawn-tennis.

And now the end had come.

Was it partly her fault? She asked herself this question, looking into his pale, troubled face. They had played together so often, caring for nothing but the pleasure of the passing hour, because other hours were so dull. Once she had attempted to teach him his catechism, had scolded him for carelessness and inattention. He had burst out laughing, and exclaimed: "I'm never going to learn any lessons from you."

After that she had salved her conscience with the reflection that Edward and the vicar, and the vicar's wife, not to mention the late Squire's sisters, who lived in the Dower House, would teach Hugo his lessons. You may be sure these worthy folk did not shirk their duty: Hugo learnt many lessons—too many. Now, with the higher wisdom which seems to flood the mind at certain crises in our lives, Cynthia Charteris realized that love, not respect, is the teacher, the Heaven-appointed teacher, of the lessons that profit us.

She put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him.

"I have not lost faith in you," she whispered.
"This is not the end."

With that, not waiting for an answer, she hurried from the room.

CHAPTER III

HUGO lit a cigarette as soon as he was alone. A few hundred yards away the woman was awaiting him with whom he expected to pass the rest of his life. Nor was she one who waited patiently for anything or anybody. The thought came to him suddenly that if he waited a little longer—a day or two—the consummation so devoutly desired by his brother Edward might be accomplished. He picked up the large framed photograph and examined it quietly. Doing so, his face hardened into the mask familiar to the spectators in the galleries of the court-room.

Once he had loved this woman.

Why?

Was the attraction purely physical? Angela Tempest had great beauty, of the most alluring kind; but beauty alone, he told himself, would not have fired the spark in him. Also she was clever, with that amazing modern cleverness whose salient characteristic—selfishness—is obscured by a pretty helplessness peculiarly feminine and exacting. She fascinated women as much almost as men, just so long as they

believed in this kitten-like claim upon their affection and protection. There was the irresistible "Come hither!" in the eye—a melting orb. Children adored her, and animals. Mrs. Grundy, however, had grown rather tired of mentioning this in palliation of conduct euphemistically termed unconventional. Nevertheless, up to the last—shall we say twenty-four hours before the terrible decree?—the sight of Mrs. Tempest with a lovely child on her lap and an intelligent terrier gazing at her with adoring eyes was sufficient to turn the head and heart of the unsophisticated to higher things. For some years the clergy, to a curate, stood her friend. Even Nonconformists refused to believe ill of the wife of a rich man who had given so much of her husband's money to the poor. "The money comes from them"—she was alluding airily to John Tempest's ownership of slum property—"and it ought to go back to them, poor dears!"

Hugo recalled her parlour tricks. There was that distracting little song of Anna Held's, which Angela sang even better, with more siren-like enchantment, than the French-woman:

"Oh, won't you come and play wiz me?
I have such a nice leetle way wiz me!"

Hugo put down the photograph with an exclamation.

A few minutes later he was alone with her

in the drawing-room of the furnished flat which she had taken after leaving her husband's house in Grosvenor Square. The room as she found it was quite impossible. Her hands had transformed it. This, indeed, was her great, her incomparable gift—daily exercised, the ever-recurrent miracle, a delight alike to friends and foes. Inanimate things she could not touch without adorning them. Of her effect upon human beings, it is worth recording that those who had suffered most at her hands came back to kiss them. Poor young Tressilian, for instance, in whom she had fanned a flame which sent him ablaze to South Africa, left her all his money. Unfortunately, it was not much. Had there been more loot—so said the cynics—Tressilian might have been encouraged to stay in England. Hugo thought of young Tressilian whenever Mrs. Tempest wore a certain necklace of diamonds and opals. It had been bought with the "loot."

She was lying back in a sofa, looking like a picture by Romney or Gainsborough, when Hugo was announced. Those who did not know her might have suspected a pose. As a matter of fact, she never posed. It was natural to her to look her best, to assume the most fitting, and therefore the most becoming, attitude (and frock) at moments when other women, less artistically endowed, are likely to disregard appearances.

"You're rather late," she said, holding out

her hand. Hugo sat down near the sofa, but not on it, for the lady occupied the exact middle, and on each side there was not quite room for another.

"I saw Edward first."

She laughed, not unkindly, with refreshing appreciation of the nature of Edward's errand. Then she added in her sympathetic voice: "I am really sorry for poor Edward; that he should suffer for our infirmities is such hard luck. I hope you were nice to him. Of course, he was horrid to you. All the same, I should have liked to have heard him speak about poor little me."

Hugo smiled faintly.

"Edward," continued Mrs. Tempest, "is not a fool, but he behaves like one on these occasions."

"This is the first occasion."

"Don't pick me up, my dear friend. You know what I mean. Edward thinks it is his duty, as head of the family, to break off our marriage. And he is perfectly right. If ever we meet, I shall tell him how he could have done it. Had he asked me to spend a quiet month at Saffron Charteris, I should have gone there to be whitewashed, and infallibly I should have died before the month was up."

Her taking for granted the marriage did not surprise Hugo, although she had never mentioned the word till to-day.

"John has been here," she added softly, with a sidelong glance at Hugo.

"John?"

She nodded.

That John Tempest should have visited his wife was so amazing that Hugo betrayed his astonishment with a gasp of incredulity.

"He was very nice," she murmured.

"Nice?"

"Why do you look like an owl? John owes me something for releasing him, and he owes me a lot for keeping my mouth shut. If I had made counter-charges, eh?"

"But what brought him here?"

"His new motor. It's a dream. He sat in the very chair you're in, and offered to write a big cheque. It was really nice of him."

"You accepted money from him?"

"No! I knew you and your prejudices. Personally, I see no reason why I shouldn't take with a humble and grateful heart as much as John cares to give me."

"That he should have come here is the most astounding thing!"

"If you must know, I sent for him."

"You *sent* for him?"

"Why not? Let us discuss this reasonably. You have that ugly frown on your face which you wore when that horrid McAllister was asking you questions. I wanted to ask John about Poppet."

Poppet was the only child, given by the court into John Tempest's keeping. Hugo shrugged his shoulders.

"Surely that sort of thing ought to be done through the lawyers?"

"How cold-blooded you are! Fancy asking for permission to see one's own darling child through a lawyer!"

"When does Poppet go to him?"

"In a day or two. Don't let's talk about it. I cried my eyes out before John."

There were indications of tears, not unsightly red lids, but violet circles under the eyes, and a drawn look about the mouth. Good, easy John, a sinner himself, had been sorry for her. In his blundering, brutal way he had tried to dry those tears with a cheque, knowing by long experience what a tear-styptic a cheque is to some women. Even John, *who knew*, was sorry for her. And such is the power of beauty in distress that Hugo, too, felt a poignant regret that things had not been ordered otherwise so far as he was concerned. Her irresponsibility quickened the sense of responsibility dormant in him. She must have guessed what was passing in his mind, for, with a sigh and a quiver of the lip, she abandoned the central position on the sofa, and, turning aside, hid her face in a big silk cushion. Hugo whispered a few words of comfort.

Presently she spoke of her plans with increasing satisfaction and assurance.

"You must nip off to Newfoundland and shoot caribou. It's a comfort to think we've the right sort of pals, isn't it?"

"Ye-es."

"In six months people will have forgotten the trial. We must go very canny at first, but with the best cook in London, and the best shooting in the country, all will yet be well. You were so clever, Hugo, as the devil's disciple; and it was dear of you to let me appear as more sinned against than sinning. You know, I'm thinking of wearing half-mourning; black and white is so becoming to fair women."

"Will you dine with me to-night?"

She laughed. "Most certainly not! That would be brazen. After this afternoon we don't meet for six months. That is in the bond. Now I'm going to ring for Poppet. No, don't run away. She will be so disappointed if she misses you. She simply adores you."

Poppet appeared within a minute.

The child, like her mother, was irresistible; but, unlike her mother, happily unconscious of the fact. She hailed Hugo with a soft little purr of satisfaction, and cuddled close to him, holding up her face to be kissed again and again. The three on the sofa might have been painted as "Domestic Bliss." A picture post-card entitled "Monsieur, Madame et Bébé" would have an enormous sale amongst those who maintain that the family is the unit of national life.

Hugo, listening to Poppet's artless prattle, feeling her lips upon his cheek, her dimpled

hands upon his neck, told himself that he was a serpent in what should have been Eden. Poppet could not see his scales, but when she did! Sooner or later—and modern children learnt these things sooner than later—Poppet would know everything, and think, with horror, perhaps, of the innocent kisses she had lavished upon him. Suddenly he unclasped her clinging arms, put her from him, and stood up. Angela divined easily enough what was in his mind. Where Edward had failed, a child might succeed. Innocence stood between her and twenty thousand a year. Why had she not foreseen this situation?

"Uncle Hugo is going abroad, Poppet. Kiss him good-bye and run off."

"Daddy said he was going abroad, too."

She spoke very disconsolately, turning large, troubled blue eyes from her mother to Hugo, who stood looking down at her, tugging at his moustache.

"Yes, we are all going abroad; but Uncle Hugo is coming back, aren't you?"

"Perhaps," said Hugo gravely.

Mrs. Tempest gave vent to a tiny cry of protest. "How dare you tease the darling!" She caught the child to her bosom, flashing an indignant and piteous glance at Hugo. Then, holding her up to kiss him, she said, cooing: "Make him promise to come back as soon as he can, Poppet. Make him swear—do you hear?"

"You'll come back?" said the child earnestly.

"Ye

"Oh, your Sam?"

"On my Sam."

She kissed him and ran out of the room. Hugo waited a moment, and then exploded. There was a leaven in him of the old Squire.

"And one day——"

"Shush-h-h!" She placed her finger upon his lips, her head upon his shoulder, and dissolved deplorably. He heard her broken, almost inarticulate phrases: "If you should not come back—— It would be too cruel—— I have no one left but you and Poppet, and she is to be taken away!"

"I swore to Poppet that I would come back."

"And we'll begin life again, dear; we'll be awfully good, but we won't be lonesome, model members of society, eh?"

"Yes, yes," Hugo muttered nervously. "Of course, certainly."

"It will be such fun drawing the claws of the tabbies."

Having accomplished her purpose, she slipped back upon the sofa, curling herself up among the big cushions with a sigh of relief; but Hugo saw tears sparkling upon her long lashes.

Just then the door opened and the child ran in.

"I quite forgot!" she exclaimed. "Oh, mummie, I've a present for you. I was to give it to you when we was quite alone; but Uncle Hugo doesn't count, does he?"

"Never did," said Hugo.

The child held out a crumpled envelope.

"Daddy gave it to me this afternoon, when he came up to the nursery to say good-bye. He said you would know what it was."

Mrs. Tempest took the envelope. A faint blush—very faint—came and went upon her cheeks.

"Why don't you open it, mummie?"

"Yes," said Hugo quietly. "Why don't you open it?"

"It's so excitin', Uncle Hugo, isn't it?"

"Very," said Hugo, with his eyes on the vanishing blush.

"O' course, I know what's in the envelope: a postal order, perhaps for ten shillings. Do open it, mummie!"

Angela was at bay, but she did not lose either her head or her charming manners. With a gesture to the man, she led the child towards the door, opened the envelope, showed her what was in it, laughed, kissed the expectant lips, and gently pushed Poppet from the room. Then, closing the door, she turned to face Hugo.

"A cheque," said Hugo grimly. There was no interrogation in his tone.

"Yes; a cheque."

"You—you fibbed just now."

"Yes, I fibbed. I couldn't tell you the truth. I'm in debt; I've nothing of my own. I was too proud to ask you, so I sent for John."

"So you sent for John."

"He's Poppet's father."

"I see."

"Not as clearly as I do."

"Quite clearly enough."

He walked to the window and looked out. Angela shrugged her shoulders, raised her delicate brows, and held out her hand, palm upwards: a pretty gesture she had acquired in a French finishing-school, kept by a marquise of the *vieille souche*. A stranger might have inferred that she was empty-handed, with a heart too full for speech. When Hugo reached the window, she sank upon her knees beside a stool between the sofa and the door. The stool—a French tabouret—was covered with a brocade of a delicate puce colour with weird splotches of purple upon it. Upon this was bowed the fair head, so that the nape of the neck shone white against the purple staining of the brocade. The kneeling figure suggested a dethroned queen at the block, awaiting the stroke of the executioner. In another woman such a pose might have appeared stagey; in her it was natural. Hugo felt this instinctively. And he knew that John Tempest—and how many others?—had struggled in vain against this supreme manifestation of an unconscious (or subconscious?) art. Always she aroused pity when another woman would have excited indignation, or even disgust. As Hugo saw her now, the unprotesting victim, meekly kneeling upon the scaffold, so she had appeared to

the judge, to the special jury, to the whole of England.

For a moment he watched her in silence. Then he raised her gently. In her abandonment her fingers had remained tightly closed. Hugo loosened the fingers, and got possession of the cheque. He glanced at it, tore it up, and dropped the bits into the fire.

"I'll send you another to-night," he said.

With that he moved towards the door. Her voice arrested him as he laid his fingers upon the handle. "You will come back, Hugo? This has made no difference?"

"In six months I shall come back."

She fluttered towards him.

"Are you furious—disgusted? Would you like to wring my neck? In your place, I'm sure I should not come back."

"I shall come back," he said steadily.

CHAPTER IV

OUTSIDE, he looked at his watch. It was past seven. Suddenly he made the discovery that he was hungry; he remembered that he had eaten no lunch, no tea, and practically no breakfast. The mere physical craving for food cleared his mind. To eat would be something definite to do. The difficulty presented itself of selecting a restaurant. He never dined at home; the clubs were out of the question; the well-known restaurants equally so. Then he recalled the name of a popular place of entertainment in Piccadilly, where he would be as safe and as much alone as in an oasis of the Great Sahara. A hansom took him there in five minutes.

Ushered into a finely-proportioned marble hall filled with happy diners, not a vacant table could he see, and but few empty chairs. A steward explained that one chair was all that could be expected: no patron monopolized a whole table. Hugo, acquiescing, found himself opposite a pleasant-faced fellow of about his own age, who nodded and pushed across a huge bill of fare. Hugo ordered his dinner,

and looked up, to find a pair of clear brown eyes regarding him curiously.

"Stranger here?"

"Yes," said Hugo, not quite easy, wondering whether he had been recognized.

"We don't often see your sort, sir, but now and again; and I always wonder how it strikes 'em. The food's all right, and the attendance, and the room, and the music; but there's a difference next door, eh?"

"In the bill," said Hugo, smiling.

"In the crowd."

Hugo looked at the crowd—workers to a man. Nobody was in evening dress, except the waiters, who wore moustaches, and spoke in guttural accents. A napkin was alluded to as a "serviette." An air of extreme respectability pervaded the place. Hugo noted these trifles almost mechanically; but the faces of the men and women challenged a sentiment deeper than mere curiosity. They were coarse-featured; noses, chins (especially chins), ears, and eyebrows stuck out aggressively. The hands busy conveying food with extraordinary swiftness to the mouths were badly modelled, but capable, as if they belonged, as indeed they did, to persons of trained executive ability. Snatches of talk fell upon Hugo's ears: business talk, an unknown tongue to him—the idler and wastrel. The women, particularly the girls, affected certain harmless airs and graces, culled possibly from some

manual of table etiquette. They called each other "dear," said "please" very frequently, and paid particular attention to the letter "h," obviously terrified lest it should drop on to the floor and be never recovered.

Watching the crowd, Hugo was sensible that he in turn was being watched.

"Hungry lot, ain't they?" remarked the young man, as the waiter brought soup. "Well, they come here because they're hungry."

"Not because they're greedy."

"We eat to live. But the food is good; the best in London at the price. That's why the place is full. And if you come once you come again."

Hugo reflected that this fellow meant to talk. And he had such a nice pair of eyes that one couldn't with any decency snub him. Also he seemed intelligent, an observer in his way, possibly a bit of a thinker. Hugo wondered what he did for a living, and hazarded a mental guess. Was he clerk, stenographer, journalist, or tradesman? From an inflection in his voice, which denoted a sense of independence, Hugo made certain that he paddled his own canoe. He asked a question: "Do you dine here often?"

"Always, when I'm in town. I travel for a big house."

So he was a bagman; hence the gift of the gab, and the slightly cock-a-hoop, but not offensive, air of assurance.

The waiter brought some fish. Hugo was helping himself, when the other said abruptly: "I should like to have your opinion on this divorce case."

He laid a slight emphasis on the "your."

"My opinion?"

"Well, sir, you belong to their class, and I dare say you think as they do. This case has made a stir. I make no doubt half the intelligent men in this big room are talking about it now. It would really interest me to hear what you think of that blackguard Charteris."

"He pronounces his name Charteris."

"Does he?" replied the other disgustedly. "I'm not a bit surprised. They ain't even labelled so that an ordinary man can know who they are. Much obliged to you, sir, for putting me straight. Charteris, eh? Now, I'm a Rad, a red-hot un, and I'm pretty well sure that you're of the opposite way of thinking, but I hope you'll agree with me that sudden extinction is too easy a death for Mister Hugo Charteris?"

"Lethal chamber? Ah! You got that out of the *Daily Mercury*?"

"No; here." He tapped a remarkably well-shaped forehead. Then, perceiving an odd expression on Hugo's face compounded of amusement and chagrin, he added hastily: "Lord! you may be a friend of his, although you don't look like it."

"Thanks."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes; we were at school and college together."

"If he is a friend, I——"

"Be quite easy! I think I'm justified in calling Hugo Charteris an enemy. All the same——" He paused, trifled with his bread, and laughed.

"What were you going to say, sir?"

Hugo hesitated, curious to arrive at the other's point of view, yet uneasy at the prospect of being stoned. Still, to see himself as others saw him, as his fellow-countrymen saw him, might be a salutary experience.

"I don't quite understand why he has excited this public rancour "

"You don't?"

So much surprise underlay the question that Hugo felt himself flushing. With an effort he said quietly: "Let us grant that he has broken one of the Commandments. How many others have done the same? Why should he be specially picked out as a scapegoat?"

"Do you know Mrs. Tempest, sir?"

"Yes."

"I saw her in court; I heard her give her evidence. I think she was the sweetest lady, the most innocent-looking creature, I ever clapped eyes on. The jury thought so, too."

"Even his lordship was visibly impressed," said Hugo sententiously.

"A baby in arms," continued the bagman,

warming to his work, "might have known that she was more sinned against than sinning. Why do you smile, sir?"

"I beg your pardon," said Hugo; "but the phrase has been used so often, hasn't it? And, of course, even a baby in arms may make mistakes sometimes. Pray go on!"

"If he had anything to say for himself, why didn't he say it?"

"I don't know."

"Depend upon it, sir, when a man says nothing, it means that he has nothing to say, and holds his tongue for fear of making matters worse."

"I give you my word that had not occurred to me"

"I'm right. It was his silence as damned him. That and being the friend of the husband—friend and *guest!* Good Lord!"

The honest fellow wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Hugo saw that he had had a pint of sherry with his dinner, and sherry is nearly as heating as righteous moral indignation. Replacing his handkerchief, a gorgeous red silk bandana, so that it would show against his blue serge coat, the bagman continued:

"I hope I ain't treading on corns, sir; but from a hard-working man's view-point the fact that this Charteris never did a day's work in his life is not in his favour."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do."

"Surely there is some virtue in abstention. Why should a rich man work when there are so many starving unemployed? Why should he take bread from another's mouth?"

The bagman opened his eyes.

"There's something in that," he agreed reluctantly. "But, bless you, there are jobs, heaps of 'em, unpaid jobs, which the rich ought to tackle: Parliament, and all that. And what I say is, any able-bodied man as hasn't a job, paid or unpaid, is a menace to the welfare of the nation. The Yankees know that. They've a maxim—I dare say you've heard it—'Root, hog, or die!'"

"'Root, hog, or die!' Wisdom in a nutshell."

"Just so, sir. I wish you good-evening."

"Good-bye," said Hugo. "I'm much obliged to you."

"Not at all." He lowered his voice. "Excuse me, but don't try to tip the waiter. It's against the rules; it ain't fair on us. And if the waiter's copped he gets the sack."

He nodded cheerily, and bustled off.

Hugo smoked to the end a long cigar before he moved. The great room emptied quickly. The diners received checks from the waiters, and paid their bills to a young woman in a box near the main entrance. Some of the regular customers exchanged a smile and a word with her—there was not time for more; then they passed on and out, leaving her cooped up, unable to stretch her limbs, a sort of Made-

moiselle Balue in black alpaca, doomed to remain for ever in a cage like this, or another just like it. Nevertheless, she had a contented face; and if she could fly from her cage a thousand other young women would tumble over each other in their anxiety to take her place.

"Root, hog, or—die!"

The positive injunction echoed in his ears. He began to twist the phrase, to analyze it. For instance, did it apply to hogs only? Was he a hog? Had Circe changed him into the unclean beast? He was not conscious of change. At any rate, he had not been conscious of change till this afternoon, when the confounded Wayfarer passed him by with a curt nod, when the swashbuckling Lancer acclaimed him as a "pal."

He tried to look at himself with detachment. If this bagman saw him as hog, if half England perceived him on "all fours," he still believed himself to be standing upright, without porcine instincts or tastes, a man.

It is true that when he attempted to consider his relations with Angela Tempest he became fogged. Once before, at the beginning of the trial, he had tried to grope his way into a clearer atmosphere; but the fog had thickened till it assumed a pea-soup consistency. Then he had stood still, doing nothing and saying nothing.

Now that sentence had been passed a clearer vision might be vouchsafed him.

Very slowly he worked his way back to

the beginnings of manhood, to his last half at Eton.

One of Fortune's favourites, success at school, had come to him swiftly with both hands full. He had loomed large in the playing-fields as a captain of the cricket eleven, in "Pop" as its most distinguished member, in the racquet-courts as keeper, in the schools as a fair scholar. At Oxford, in the "House," his career had not been quite so blameless. Ultimately he was sent down (for a venial offence), and had not returned to take his degree. Instead, the shooting of the largest red-deer in the Altai Mountains had engrossed his attention and energies, whetting to razor-edge a hereditary keenness and aptitude for sport. After that followed an expedition into the Canadian sub-arctic forests in search of musk-ox. After that, again, expeditions to Somaliland, Thibet, and Manchuria, without prejudice to the slaughter of fish, and flesh, and fowl in the United Kingdom.

Within a decade he achieved fame as a hunter of big and small game. Up to this point in his career it is safe to affirm that he was perfectly satisfied with himself and a life which contrast so far had kept clean and sane. For six months each year he was up to his knees in clover: the rest of the time he endured with extraordinary good temper hardships which might have tried Job.

During these wander-years he had passed

almost out of sight of Cynthia Charteris. For him she remained, at a distance, the best woman in the world, the one and only. He used to begin his letters to her: "My dear Halo." But he spent very little time at Saffron Charteris, and most of that on the stubbles or in the coverts. Without a word between them, it was understood that Cynthia was disappointed. She lived in a county where partridges are regarded as the first importance. Briefly, it had been *toujours perdrix* with her. Edward, with a ponderous attempt at a joke, said she was "gun-shy." Edward, however, with all his limitations, commanded respect as an excellent landlord. He had written a monograph on East Anglian subsoils; he was chairman of the Conservative Association, a County Councillor, and one of the soundest magistrates on the bench. In his heart of hearts he may have thought St. Partridge nearer and dearer to him than St. Paul, but that did not prevent his taking the Communion regularly upon the first Sunday of every month. From that night when she found Hugo under the bed, Cynthia had planned for his successful future. All the best women build castles in Spain for others to live in; and Hugo, with his good looks, his good manners, and his good brains, plus a large income, was obviously destined to occupy a palace. We know that Cynthia (she was very young) had not begun by bending the twig in the direction of duty. Perhaps this explains

her silence afterwards. She had striven to give the boy a good time; and she had been so successful that he acquired the habit of it. When he pursued pleasure—or what to him was pleasure—above the snow-line, she blamed herself. More, she said as much to Edward, who agreed with her exasperatingly: “You were far too kind, my dear. I said nothing at the time, but you used to give him thin bread-and-butter for his tea!” When Cynthia repeated this to Hugo, he also said exasperatingly: “You darling old thing, I expect you did give me too much butter!” After that she held her tongue.

Hugo had finished his first cigar when he reached this point. Indeed, he had smoked it to the last bitter inch, and a bad taste was in his mouth, from which he might have deduced a profitable moral lesson. Instead, he lit another, and ordered some more coffee. He had met Angela Tempest after his return from Manchuria. John had come up to him in the enclosure at Ascot, and had said: “I say, I want to introduce you to my wife. She’s an angel!” And then Hugo, looking at John’s big pink face, and knowing something of John’s past, which had more than a tinge of pink in it, had replied with a laugh: “An angel, by Jove! What on earth made her marry you?” To this John replied solemnly: “Why, to reform me, of course! And, Gad! she’s done it, too!” Of course she hadn’t.

It is not easy to reform men like John Tempest. He had his good points—who hasn't?—but continence was not one of them. Excessively good-natured, very generous, of a sanguine and most affectionate temperament, and enormously rich, he had run riot, with the cry behind him: "Ware marriage!" Having just sense and modesty enough to know that he was not likely to inspire either love or respect in the feminine bosom, he married Angela out of the schoolroom, being "intended" for her elder sister.

Hugo had never believed Angela to be a party to what was called at the time a commercial transaction. It is inconceivable that she could have loved John, but doubtless she liked him, and, although barely seventeen, was able to measure the distance between the very rich and the very poor. As the fourth daughter of an impoverished Scottish baron, she was made to understand that God had been good to her. Her mother, Lady Barnbogle, saw the finger of Providence: it pointed to the big house in Grosvenor Square, the forest in Scotland, the great abbey in the Dukeries.

John led Hugo up to his wife, and with a curt "You two will about hit it off," went back into the paddock, where one of his horses was being saddled for the Royal Hunt Cup.

But at first they didn't hit it off. That was the beginning of the mischief. Angela, admittedly, had every right to consider herself

the prettiest bride of the season. Had she remained in miraculous ignorance of this self-evident fact, at least twenty men would have enlightened her twenty times a day. The smart boys buzzed about her from morning till night, and nearly all night. She told them that she "adored her stupid old John." Nobody believed this, except stupid old John himself. Hugo, who had been John's fag at Eton, did not approve of these youngsters who called themselves Angelicans, and ate, drank, and made exceeding merry at John's expense, and behind his back. Let it be added that Angela did not encourage the friars. The most audacious dared not say a word against John in her presence.

The Angelicans offered to make Hugo a member of the order. His too curt refusal was reported to Angela within half an hour. She smiled, and remarked that Mr. Charteris seemed a sensible man; but, inwardly, she vowed to make a fool of him.

During the next year Hugo was regarded as John's friend. This made the case very black when it was artfully presented to the jury by McAllister, K.C. Hugo yachted with John, hunted with John, shot with John. Incidentally he came to know John passing well, and by the end of the year their friendship—if you care to use so fine a word for a very workaday intercourse—had come to an end. Hugo found out that John had not reformed. John de-

plored what he called a constitutional weakness, said that he loved his wife devotedly, and was prepared to make any sacrifice (except one) rather than that she should find out how it was with him.

Hugo began to wonder whether Angela had found out: a dangerous and absorbing speculation. Then Poppet was born. John's pride in Poppet kept him straight for a few months; the fall followed inevitably.

Shortly after this Angela got a strangle-hold, so to speak, on Hugo's throat. The hold is now forbidden, I believe, in ordinary wrestling between men, but some women use it. Technically, it is a hold that cannot be countered, and therefore very properly barred, as spoiling an otherwise interesting pastime. In the great game of love or friendship, as played between man and woman, this particular hold is not very easily described, although familiar enough to most of us. Briefly, a man is made to understand that he is absolutely necessary to the comfort and happiness of a woman who belongs to another man. Once in such toils he can twiddle his thumbs for ever, and try to resolve the ancient riddle: "Is it better to love or be loved?"

For a long time the friendship between Hugo and Angela remained perfectly innocent. It would be writing Hugo down an ass to add that the lady was able to preserve all her angelic attributes in the syrup of a sentimental and

Platonic attachment. But she fooled her victim very prettily; and if he wore motley he became aware of it insensibly.

It will never be known when she discovered the truth about John. From the first, the cynic will affirm. The more charitable may hope that the discovery was made after Poppet's birth. Bearing in mind John's precautions, one must feel reasonably certain that the sword impended for many months before it fell. When it did fall, Hugo maintained that all knots had been cut. John, who behaved like a soundly thrashed spaniel, blubbered over the possibility of being separated from Poppet. For the moment Poppet seemed to fill the Abbey—an enormous place. Lady Barnbogle rushed down from Ayrshire. Hugo could smile now at the recollection of his interview with that august personage, but it was no laughing matter at the time.

"You have dared to advise my daughter to leave her husband."

"Yes."

"You have taken a most unwarrantable liberty. I may add that Barnbogle and myself have never approved of your friendship for Angela."

"I am sorry."

"I wish I could believe that. Of course, I do not propose to discuss this with you from a religious point of view."

"Thank you."

"And I should not discuss it at all were it

not for the absurd and compromising influence that you seem to exercise over my poor child. She"—the lady almost choked with indignation—"she referred me to you. I can hardly believe that she is my own daughter."

"I have had difficulty in believing that, too," said Hugo. Then he added, with a glint in his eye: "Am I to understand that you hold a brief for John?"

"John is a deeply penitent man. It is not for me to judge John. But I should like you to understand that I was a wife before I was a mother, Mr. Charteris."

"I have always understood that, Lady Barnbogle."

"I mean that for the moment I have tried to forget that Angela is my own flesh and blood. A husband may sin, Mr. Charteris, and his wife may loathe his sin, but my Bible teaches me, not to mention my experience of the world, that it is a wife's duty to love the sinner."

"Not an easy thing to do," said Hugo, "even when he has eighty thousand a year."

"Sir!"

"You may take my word for it that Angela never could and never has loved—John."

Lady Barnbogle glared into Hugo's cool, grey eyes.

"That is because——"

"Yes?"

"Because you have come between husband and wife."

"I hope so," said Hugo gravely.

"That you should say this to me!"

"Lady Barnbogle, my love for your daughter has not hurt her. And if I have been willing to give everything and receive nothing—*nothing*, do you hear?—are you the one to throw stones at me? Perhaps you do not know John as I know him. He may be deeply penitent—I am sure he is—but his penitence will be blown inside out at sight of the next pretty face. Come, join with me in undoing a marriage which you made."

"Yes; I made it. I knew what I was doing; I accept the responsibility." She spoke in a hard, unyielding voice, but behind it quivered a note of pain. Hugo had always disliked this match-making mother intensely, as a trafficker in white slaves driven to the Mayfair market and sold without reserve to the highest bidder. Now, for the first time, a curious doubt assailed him.

"You say you knew what you were doing."

They were sitting in the big drawing-room in Grosvenor Square. When the bolt fell, John remained at the Abbey, Angela fled to town. The room was one of the most beautiful in London. It expressed subtly not only Angela's exquisite refinement of taste and her sense of colour, but, what was more striking to the observant eye, her elimination of everything not of the rarest and most costly. Perfect taste with a moderate income could never have achieved

such an amazing result. Lady Barnbogle looked thoughtfully at a cabinet by Gouthière; then, very abruptly, she said: "Surely you have found Angela out?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"She loves things better than persons. If you don't know that, I am rather sorry for you. She gets it from her father. I say that this marriage, which I made, has turned out happily, because Angela has been able to furnish this room, and other rooms. Does she look unhappy? This scandal has made her uncomfortable, of course, and she resents that; but how many tears has she shed? Look into her eyes and judge for yourself. I may not know John Tempest as well as you do, but I know my daughter, who spends five thousand a year on her clothes. I don't think there is much more to be said. I shall advise Angela to forgive John; and I advise you to find another friend who can offer something instead of nothing in return for your undivided attention and affection. Good-morning."

The august lady retired with the honours.

Hugo, of course, did not believe that Angela preferred things to persons.

Ultimately John was forgiven, and life flowed on much as before, till John returned to his husks.

We shall pass over what followed as briefly as may be. Hugo entreated Angela to leave her husband: she refused. Once more Poppet was used as a bludgeon to crush argument.

Then the inevitable happened. No attempt will be made to minimize or to palliate Hugo's sin. He became that most despicable of all male creatures—a married woman's chattel. He reached the depths inch by inch, struggling against tentacles that relentlessly sucked him down. Society, as usual, aided and abetted, provisionally. Such charming sinners must not be found out.

Now, sitting by himself, thinking it all over, seeing himself and the past three years with a detachment hitherto unachievable, he marvelled that he could have gone through it. More, he wondered that any man would or could submit to such degrading slavery. The horrors of an illicit relation ought to be preached from every pulpit, made plain to every schoolboy and schoolgirl. From every point of view—the Christian, the pagan, the materialist's, the hedonist's—what was to be gained from such a connection except misery, humiliation, and disgrace? We ring down the curtain upon the climax: John's discovery of a fact known to all his relations, all his friends, and all his servants. The sight of this big, blundering, red-faced fellow, who had believed his wife to be an angel, moves us to tears or laughter, perhaps both. This was the one clause in his creed: *I believe in my wife.* Everything else had gone by the board. Through thick and thin she had been angelic: the perfect wife, the perfect mother, dealing mercifully with his weakness,

because so strong in her own invulnerable virtue. He positively bellowed with pain.

Mutual friends tried to make the best of a sad business. The whitewashers suggested (1) an amicable separation; (2) that Angela should divorce John. The lawyers, with a side-long glance at the King's Proctor, shook their heads. It might not be easy to divorce John. He had never been cruel—very much the contrary. The head of the firm of solicitors who had the vast Tempest estates in their charge hinted at re-marriage and the desirability of an heir. Hugo clinched the matter by refusing to bring counter-charges. The rest is to be found in the newspapers.

Hugo rose from his table, called for his check, and approached the girl in the cage. She awaited him with smiling eyes and slightly uplifted brows, wondering what brought a swell to a two-shilling ordinary. Hugo paid his bill and asked a question: "Do you find it very dull in there?"

She laughed. "I get my salary regularly every Saturday night."

"I see. I hope it's a good one."

"We're well paid, sir, thank you; and the work is light. Mother tells me I'm a very lucky girl."

Hugo went back to his flat, where the ever-faithful Pixton received him. Then he wrote a cheque and dispatched it to Angela. This

done, his face cleared a little. For six months to come he was free—free! He stretched out his arms and shook himself. Then he remembered that at the end of the six months he would have to go back to a woman who loved things better than persons. Hugo turned to stare at his mother's picture. Presently, in a very low voice, he whispered: "Aren't you glad you're dead?"

CHAPTER V

HE woke next morning none the better for a bad night, disturbed by absurd dreams, in which he had taken a leading part as hog, constrained to root assiduously or die; while a lady, with a face like Lady Hamilton's, and, if less gorgeously, far better dressed than the Queen of Sheba, looked on applaudingly. Whenever he unearthed a truffle she gobbled it.

At breakfast Pixton's imperturbable expression got on his nerves. What did Pixton really think? Was he capable of sustained thought? And if he thought at all, could his thoughts be translated into plain speech? As a boy Pixton had been rather voluble. One had really to stop him when once he tackled the engrossing subject of ferrets. It might unloose his tongue if he were addressed suddenly as "Bill." Happy thought, that!

"Well, Bill, what are we going to do now?"

Pixton nearly dropped the fresh toast which he had just brought in. For a moment he

became a boy again: a boy's vacuous grin glimmered upon his sallow face.

"I dunno, Master Hugo. I s'pose in old days we'd ha' tried another bury" (burrow).

"Bravo, Bill! I thought I should strike fire from your flinty phiz. Try another bury, eh?"

"Yes, sir." Pixton had spent an hour reading in half a dozen papers the comments on the trial. Hugo's light tone had carried him back to the warren at Saffron Charteris. Now he was in London again—the mute at a beloved master's funeral. Hugo looked at him and smiled. Well, well, old Pixton was right. And words were cheap, unless you employed a K.C. to speak them; and something infinitely greater than words bound master and man together. He finished a sorry meal in silence.

A pile of letters lay by his plate. Plenty of time to read them when he had lighted a pipe. Time, indeed, stretched before him like a Siberian steppe in September, brown, arid, illimitable — a desert between Nothing and Nowhere. With an impatient gesture he knocked over the neat pile so carefully arranged by the impeccable Pixton. One envelope challenged his attention. He recognized the handwriting, although he had not seen it for two or three years. With a slight exclamation he picked up the letter and tore it open. It was from the Wayfarer, who had seemed to tilt a too fastidious nose upon the preceding afternoon.

"DEAR HUGO" (it began),

"Did you curse me for one of the 'unco guid' yesterday? Perhaps. I rather avoided you because I felt that you might not wish to speak to anyone just at that moment. But it has been on my mind ever since that I was wrong, and that you would, or might, misinterpret my silence. We used to be great friends. And now, if I can help you in any way, let me do so, because of those good old times. We might nip off somewhere together.

"Yours ever,
"JIM."

Tobacco tasted sweeter after this. Hugo read the letter three times, and then put it away in a drawer. He felt strangely warmed and comforted, but at the same time apathetic. Time was when he would have snatched up a telegram-form, scribbled on it, "Go with you to the uttermost ends of the earth," and dispatched it. Now he sat in his chair, smoking and reflecting that the uttermost ends of the earth were a long way off. If it were possible, he would like to sit just where he was for a few years, see nobody, do nothing, take a rest-cure. He told Pixton that he was "not at home," no matter who might call. Pixton's bland "Very good, sir," seemed to commend this resolution. He did not open the other letters, nor did he glance at the morning papers.

An hour or two passed. Then Pixton appeared, rather flustered.

"Mrs. Tempest, sir. She must see you for five minutes. I said you had an 'eadache, and was seeing nobody."

Hugo went into the sitting-room. Angela, sitting in the most comfortable chair, nodded when Hugo appeared.

"I ran in to thank you for the cheque, and to tell you a bit of news. I've had a letter from John. He'll let me keep Poppet for the next six months, provided I don't see you. I dashed off a note promising faithfully all he asked."

"And you break that promise at once."

"Don't be idiotic! John is certainly behaving well, with a delicacy which is quite astounding. Apart from the delight of having the darling with me, her presence will make all the difference. There is no chaperon like a child. The victory is half won."

"What victory?"

"My dear old boy, how stupid you are this morning! My victory—*our* victory—over a horrid, unkind world. Have you read the papers?"

"No."

"I have. They let me down rather easy." She smiled complacently. "I owe that entirely to you, Hugo, and I'm going to be *so* grateful in six months' time. You'll see. Meanwhile, the sooner you start for Newfoundland the better."

"To Newfoundland?"

"Didn't you say Newfoundland? Oh, I said so! It makes no difference. You must clear out."

"You said you were going abroad."

"I've changed my mind. I have the flat. And I shall teach Poppet her lessons, and be seen everywhere with her."

"In half mourning?"

"No flowers except violets. St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, on Sunday morning; the Albert Hall, with Poppet, in the afternoon. I may do a little slumming."

"What a charming comedy!"

"As to that, there will, of course, be no leading man. My poor Hugo, how terribly I shall miss you! And how you will miss *me*! But you will kill millions of caribou."

"It's too late to shoot caribou. I thought of staying here and locking the front-door. I might hang a yard or two of crape on it."

"Seriously, you must go away."

"I shall do so if you decide to stay in town."

"Where will you go?"

"My fancy turns to Jericho."

When she had gone Hugo opened the window. He wanted air, and he wanted to get rid of the faint perfume she had left behind her—a scent whose name he had forgotten. Once he had told her that this particular scent, so elusively, subtly fragrant, was the sweetest odour on earth for him. She had replied, with a smile which robbed the words of any taint of vulgarity, that the scent was the costliest in the world. The

Empress of Russia used it, and Sarah Bernhardt. He rang the bell for Pixton.

"Pack my kit-bag! A couple of rough suits and necessaries. I shan't want you. Whistle up a hansom in half an hour."

"Where shall I label the bag, sir?"

"Jericho."

Pixton packed the kit-bag while Hugo routed out an atlas. After all, Jericho was rather remote. He glanced indifferently at the map. Should he travel north, south, east, or west? Where could he find a nice quiet spot?

Afterwards he remembered what a trifle guided his decision. He was seriously thinking of taking a pencil, shutting his eyes and making a dab at the map, when he found his glance riveted upon a beautiful proof-engraving of the Iron Duke. Wellington—Waterloo! Of course, he would drive to Waterloo. The ticket-clerk was sure to be a knowledgeable person.

The ticket-clerk not only aroused expectation, but satisfied it. A quiet spot? Certainly. There was no quieter spot in November than the Forest of Ys. Hugo had never seen the Forest of Ys. He knew nobody who lived there. He bought a ticket to Ys.

Once in the train, however, a reaction took place. To many of us travel is an exhilaration. To be borne swiftly through pleasant places, the woods, the fields, the hills, and vales of such a prosperous country as England; to see, panoramically, the results of a thousand years

of labour and civilization; to feel that we are part-owners of this goodly heritage, that we are sons of the soil, is a stimulant indeed to the imaginative mind, particularly when it is young. To-day Hugo felt old, worn out. He tried to think of something, anything, concrete or abstract, that would thrill his pulses, and failed. He knew that certain drugs might do it. Monte Cristo took hasheesh. Could one walk into a one-price drug store and ask for a shilling's-worth of hasheesh? Then there was opium in its many forms. Hugo had visited Chinatown in San Francisco. He recalled a pestilential den where he had seen a miserable wretch so thin that his bones were nearly through his face, but with a seraphic smile on his blue lips. To the horror of everybody, it was discovered that the man was dead, but his smile was alive. It could speak: it was eloquent of that silence to which the spirit informing the bundle of skin and bone had passed.

At Southleigh, Hugo got out to wait for a slower train.

While suspending judgment on what followed, it may be well to consider briefly but carefully what went before. Hugo had been beguiled by a siren. In men of Hugo's temperament and character, where there is the fusion (far less rare than is commonly supposed) of doer and dreamer, you will find a fund—a deposit account, so to speak—of love and sympathy,

which accumulates imperceptibly during the period of action, when practically no drafts are made upon it. Such women as Angela Tempest have a nose for these accumulations. Her first cheque was honoured instantly. To carry on the figure she divined her credit to be unlimited. After that for a couple of years all drafts upon friendship were met. At the end, as we have seen, Hugo had honoured—dishonour.

Up to the very last Angela interposed a rose-coloured glamour between sense and sentiment, between fact and fancy. McAllister, K.C., tore this pretty veil to tatters. One sees the chiffon floating from his horns—a bull in a boudoir. Some pretty sinners in the galleries felt quite faint when they heard his raucous Scotch accent dealing with what they had conceived to be a romantic situation. We have said that Hugo suffered acutely, but his sufferings in the court-room had been alleviated by the reflection that what was stripped from him served as a carpet between Angela's feet and the mud. She was bespattered, of course, but not sunk up to the neck in mire as he was. McAllister, perhaps designedly, had spared her. If he saw the butterfly—which is almost certain—he realized that to pin it quivering to his brief would alienate the sympathies of the jury, honest householders to a man, married to plain, respectable wives, served by plain, respectable parlourmaids, and therefore

the more easily dazzled by beauty. McAllister, canny pleader, had attacked strength, not weakness, and had triumphed superbly.

When he had presented his case, no illusions were left to Hugo, or, indeed, to anyone else. This, perhaps, was the famous counsel's greatest triumph: he had revealed Hugo to himself. Also, to Hugo (and to a very few of the elect) he had revealed Angela. His pitiless logic exhibited to the groundlings a lovely creature in the toils, struggling desperately from the first, but physically and mentally unable to extricate herself. Every incident, the accumulated testimony of the witnesses on each side, set forth and illuminated this abominable spectacle of spider and fly. (McAllister disdained not the tritest metaphors.) But to Hugo and the very few (Cynthia Charteris was one of them) this brutal revelation exposed Angela as spider. The limelight of cross-examination illuminated her motives and designs, not Hugo's. What made the whole case so black was the evidence of plot and plan: an organized campaign from beginning to end. When McAllister pushed his wig into place and sat down for the last time, Hugo knew that Angela was no more capable of love than a limpet. But what would become of her if she were torn from the rock to which she had attached herself?

The answer came to Hugo in the train. She would attach herself to some other rock.

Under the most favourable circumstances Southleigh Station is not a place one would choose as a spot wherein to linger. Hugo went into the general waiting-room, where—windows and door being tightly shut—a fire, struggling against an atmosphere lacking in oxygen, had prematurely expired. Hugo sat down upon a wooden bench. Outside it drizzled, the fine rain falling silently through a thickening mist. The too short day was drawing to a close, flickering out like the few red cinders in the grate. A spark burned in the solitary gas-jet. Hugo might have turned the spark into a flame, but this did not occur to him. Nevertheless, this wretched spark flickered upon the faces of two women who sat huddled up near the grate upon the only two chairs provided by the company. They were dressed in rusty black, wearing extraordinary bonnets, tilted forward at a ludicrous angle to their yellow, shiny foreheads. Two sharp, red noses looked as if they had poked themselves into queer corners. From two pairs of thin, discoloured lips dribbled an endless prattle concerning a funeral from which they were returning. Their hands, red and rough, misshapen from constant toil, lay patiently upon their laps. They had taken off their gloves to save them against a future occasion.

“Her was glad to go. I ’ad it from ’er own lips las’ Sunday as ever was.”

“You did? Well, I never!”

"You and me, dear, 'angs on to life because the good Lord He knows what 'usbands and children 'd do without we."

"Seemingly, her never got over her darters marryin'."

"'Tis true as true. And I did say, 'Cheer up! After the weddin's comes the funerals;' but her shook 'er 'ead, as if that theer was no comfort; and now her's the first to go."

"When we uns ain't wanted no more, us do drop like rotten apples from a tree."

Hugo rose and went out into the drizzle. The drone of the women's voices echoed in his ears. Suddenly it came upon him with overpowering conviction that life to many millions was woven out of fustian with a smell of damp about it, lit by a flickering spark, uniformly sable in hue. He tried to apprehend the order of mind that looks forward to funerals as a source of entertainment second only to weddings! Unable to accomplish such a feat of imagination, he looked at the rails, wet and shining, stretching out into the grey mists, which swallowed them up; but he still heard the dismal drawl of the elder woman: "When we ain't wanted, us do drop like rotten apples from a tree."

In the far distance a faint humming was heard, deepening into an ever-increasing growl. The Avonmouth express was approaching, and five minutes late. Out of the fog she roared, screaming shrilly as she struck the points

before entering the station. Hugo fixed fascinated eyes upon the monster. An uncontrollable impulse seized him. He must fling himself across those shining rails. For that purpose, and no other, he had come thither, led by Fate. His head was reeling, his knees trembled—

"Bit too near, sir," he heard the platform inspector say. The man's strong hand was on his arm, gripping it.

"Thank you," said Hugo, in a voice he hardly recognized as his own. The train rushed on and out of sight as the inspector relaxed his grip.

"Next train 's yours, sir," said the inspector. "That one don't stop. She was going sixty mile an hour when you took a notion to board her."

He hurried away, quite unsuspecting. Hugo wiped the cold sweat from his face. He had been near death many times, but never so near as this.

Henceforward he knew that the merciful verdict, assigning an unsound mind as the controlling power behind the irrevocable act, was justified. He, a sane man, had been mad, raving mad, for one never-to-be-forgotten instant, and no more responsible for the impulse which lured him to destruction than a baby toddling towards the edge of a precipice.

Next day he walked into the Forest of Ys;

and, lo! a miracle. The sun, half-way to the zenith, shone in a sky palely blue, not yet purged of mist. Upon the low-lying, marshy ground this white, milky mist spread an opalescent carpet. Higher up the masses of brown bracken threw into gleaming relief the vivid green of the glades, fairy-like alleys leading into the mysterious depths of the forest, Nature's footpaths—never straight—winding on and on in gracious curves, rarely trodden save by the creatures of Arcadia, leading the explorer into an enchanted land, into aisles of stately beech-trees where, perhaps, William of Wykeham was inspired to set forth in stone what God showed to him in soaring trunks and branches; into groves of mighty oaks, long rooted in the soil when Trafalgar was fought and won, the oaks of kin to those immortal trees that died to live for ever as the *Victory* and the fighting *Téméraire*; into thickets of holly, into melancholy plantations of fir; and then up and out to breezy, wind-swept moors, whence the whole domain might be seen—a divine panorama.

But the miracle was the colour. In early November, the leaf hung thick upon the trees; and the oaks were still green with a touch of russet, but the beeches had flamed into such red and gold as you may find in the maple forests of America. Here and there a solitary birch would stand out like an amber feather against a purple background of firs. For the

most part, however, the trees—gregarious creatures—presented themselves in battalions. Regarding them as a vast army from the high ground near Kingscross, one perceived vedettes of holly and whin, a long, thin skirmishing line of bracken—from which the mist curled upward like smoke from rifles—and then the serried ranks of the veterans, regiment upon regiment, brigades, army corps.

Hugo inhaled the crisp, clean air: an intoxicating draught, more potent than hasheesh or all the infusions of the poppy. What had passed seemed like a nightmare. With a firm stride he descended the steep hill which leads to the King's Stone, paused to read the inscription upon it, and then, leaving the woodland, came out upon the heath beyond.

Here, to his surprise, he found a golf-course, one of the prettiest in the world. Ascending the opposite hill, he could see the different greens plainly outlined against the bracken and heather. To his surprise, nobody was playing. On the edge of a grove of oaks, snuffing the breeze, stood a lordly buck; near one of the greens was a small herd of forest ponies, shaggy as Shetlands; above him a hawk circled. Of other life there was no evidence.

Hugo sat down upon a sunny bank in the lee of the wind, which blew softly from the west. He had found what he sought—peace; and more than he sought—beauty, the pastoral

beauty so dear to the English heart. He told himself that if he could find quiet lodgings he would spend some months here,

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

He lit his pipe, feeling the warmth of the sun upon his face and hands. The celestial scene obsessed him. The mist had nearly vanished, but its invisible veil softened all outlines, lending a deeper blue to the shadows, and imparting an atmosphere of mystery and enchantment to the landscape.

The buck slipped back into harbourage, the hawk spread a wider wing. Hugo wondered whether man or woman would appear. Reeks of smoke rising above the trees indicated human habitations.

Suddenly he heard voices, a gay laugh, virile and youthful; and then its feminine echo, a silvery crescendo of joyous sound. A man and a girl carrying golf-clubs approached. Hugo perceived them before they saw him. With no surprise—so absolutely fitting, so pat to the moment was their advent—he realised that if he had been given a free hand to place a couple of figures in this landscape, he could have found no better models, though he ranged the kingdom for them. The man was young and extraordinarily good-looking, using the word literally. His large, luminous eyes, set far apart, shone with that unmistakable radiance so eloquent of high ideals and enthusiasms.

His mouth, slightly effeminate in its tender curves, seemed to be fashioned expressly to give utterance to words of good report; the chin was strong and finely modelled, the brow ample. In a word—Galahad.

The girl beside him had a charm greater than beauty: a crystalline freshness and innocence, an indescribable aura of happiness, which in these latter days may be found rather in Latin countries than in our enlightened Northern lands. Hugo told himself that she was Arcadian: a nymph of the woods and streams, Rosalind, tall, slender, graceful: a happy union of mirth and youth and kindness, with a well-hung skirt and in a becoming hat.

It seems churlish to record that her mouth was too large, and her nose nondescript: neither aquiline, Greek, nor pug, but certainly tip-tilted. She had blue eyes with queer brown flecks in them, as if sunshine had freckled the irids. Add a chin as firm as the youth's, but with an adorable dimple (the adjective is Galahad's).

They passed Hugo with a quick glance of indifference, occupied entirely with each other. The girl's eyes may have lingered for an appreciable moment upon the stranger, sensible, perhaps, that he was examining her with keen, although polite interest.

"Your honour, Joy."

She drove a fair ball; he drove much farther, but not so straight. Side by side they descended

the slope towards the green. The girl holed out in five; evidently she was no tyro at the ancient game; the man made a sad mess of it, being, as obviously, a duffer. But Hugo heard him laugh gaily. Nor was he superior to receiving hints from the lady. How pleasant to be coached by such a creature!

And her name was—Joy.

What fairy godmother had inspired the name?

He rose, reluctantly, to discover what lay beneath the reeks of smoke to the left: cottages, picturesque, but not in the best repair. Farther on were more cottages, a small hamlet with the inevitable tavern, but no sign of a church. Hugo approached the tavern, the ordinary village inn, to be commended possibly for its cheese and ale, nothing more. Sauntering by, an object of interest to three urchins and a herd of geese, he saw a larger cottage, ivy-clad, facing the high-road, with an air of gentility, modestly courting inspection by reason of a neat sign—"Jordan Cottage," and below, in clear white letters, "Apartments."

Hugo hesitated, knocked the ashes from his pipe, approached a porch covered in summer with honey-suckle, set between latticed windows, and, finding no bell, tapped firmly upon a stout oak door.

CHAPTER VI

THE most respectable female he had ever seen opened the door. Small, steel-grey eyes glinted out of a shiny expanse of pink flesh. A white cap crowned some wisps of grizzled hair, parted in the middle and plastered tight to the head, as if with the determination that what was left of a once abundant crop should not be suffered to escape. An immaculate apron bespoke the housekeeper who is rich enough to afford a cook.

"You have apartments to let?"

The respectable female eyed the stranger sharply. Her round, smug face could hardly be said to relax, but, almost immediately, it was suffused with a pleasant glow. Even the great McAllister had remarked that the defendant was, unhappily, more likely to inspire confidence than distrust.

"Certainly. Please come in, sir. There's a nice fire in the sitting-room."

Hugo was ushered into a small, square room on the left, simply furnished with substantial furniture. Three easy-chairs had been designed obviously for the comfort of the sterner sex.

Near the fireplace stood what used to be called a chiffonier. Upon the top of this were some really excellent bits of lustre and a couple of Toby-jugs. Back to the wall was a piano with a high top of fluted red silk. A red flock-paper covered the walls, upon which hung half a dozen sporting prints of "The Right Sort doing the Thing well." Red rep curtains flanked the double casement. A canary, in a gilt cage, put his head on one side and examined Hugo with beady, bright eyes.

"Very snug," said Hugo.

"All the gentlemen say that, sir. As I used to remark to my husband as was: 'Give a man good victuals, an easy bed, and a comfortable room, and what more can he want?'"

Hugo saw a jar of tobacco on the mantelshelf, and a couple of briar pipes beside it.

"You have other lodgers?"

"Only one, sir: a young gentleman, very well connected—very pleasant young gentleman, Mr. Esmé Burgess. You'll have heard of him?"

"Mr. Esmé Burgess? Never."

"Dear me! He did great things at Oxford, sir. And he's going into Parlyment. And, excuse me, sir, he mightn't like it mentioned, but"—her voice sank to a thrilling whisper—"he—writes!"

"Horses shall not drag that secret from me."

"Thank you kindly, sir. He's the only lodger I have at present. In the summer—

well, there!—I turn 'em away from the door every fine day, I do, indeed."

"I'm sure of it. I fancy I may have met Mr. Burgess on the links: a handsome young man, with dark eyes and hair."

"And a be-utiful smile, sir."

"Captivating! A young lady was with him."

"Miss Joy Vennable that would be. As good as she's pretty. Parson's daughter, too. And they ain't always just what they should be. Shall I show you the bedrooms, sir?"

"If you please."

When they descended, a few minutes later, arrangements had been made—most satisfactory from the landlady's point of view, for Hugo had paid a five-pound note on account—the best letter of credit in boarding-house circles. And he had not haggled about terms.

"When shall I look for you, sir?"

"To-night, at tea-time. By the way, why do you call this Jordan Co' age?"

"Because it stands on the banks o' Jordan."

"I see; that is the name of the brook I crossed just now?"

"There's no better water in the Forest of Ys; and soft—my!"

"But why Jordan?"

"It's always been called Jordan, sir."

"Perhaps the river in Palestine, the river in which Naaman washed and was made clean, was called after this pretty stream."

The landlady laughed.

"You gentlemen will have your joke, but I dessay there's more in the name than meets the eye. Naaman, to be sure! A leper! And he came out white as snow, but no whiter than my apron, I'll be bound. That was washed in our Jordan."

Hugo did not correct her, but he looked at the apron.

"If you could ha' seen it when it went in! I'd upset a bottle of ink over it. And I just popped it there and then into the stream, and let it lie for twenty-four hours. Excuse me, sir, may I take the liberty of askin' your name?"

"Charteris."

"Thank you, sir. C-h-a-r-t-e-r-s?"

Hugo hesitated. Then he nodded carelessly. This good woman was a gossip, and the proper spelling of Charteris would excite discussion and invite discovery. He shrank from the gaping mouth, the fatuous grin of the enlightened yokel. Meantime, his landlady had produced an ancient ledger, in which she was solemnly inscribing his name.

"Christian name, if I may make so bold?"

"Reginald." This, indeed, was his second name, never used.

"Thank you, sir. My name is Owbridge—Sarah Owbridge. Mr. Owbridge left me a widow nearly ten years ago. He suffered crool with anginy pectoris, and was took

sudden when least expected: died because the doctor couldn't get to him."

She spoke quite cheerfully, but expected a word of sympathy. Hugo gave it:

"Ah, Mrs. Owbridge, think how many people die because the doctors *do* get to them."

Whereat Mrs. Owbridge wiped her eye, for form's sake, and laughed. As soon as Hugo had started to walk back to Ys, she hastened to inform a neighbour that the new lodger was one of the "quality," and fond of his joke.

Meantime, Hugo was reflecting, not without satisfaction, that he had been swallowed up in forest mists, not so thick, perhaps, as Newfoundland fogs, but thick enough to turn what was black into a harmless and discreet grey. Trudging along, he surveyed Arcadia with a restful eye. He meant to insert a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, stating that he had gone abroad. Already he had cancelled his many shooting engagements. Angela would believe him to be in the wilds, and would, accordingly, expect no letters.

He swung his stick and laughed. Men reprieved from the gallows laugh; and why not? Only yesterday at Southleigh——! Well, that was to be pushed from sight and memory.

Later in the day he drove over to Hershaw Parva, the name of the hamlet, and his kit-bag was conspicuously labelled—Reginald

Charters. In his room at Ys he had spent some time in removing tell-tale marks from clothes and linen. All that was marked in ink he dispatched to the faithful Pixton, instructing him to send down his golf-clubs and more clothes. To Pixton the change of name and plan was told. Pixton might be trusted to hold the fort and keep inquisitive visitors at bay. Having done this, Hugo laughed again.

He experienced a certain boyish delight in turning over a new page, a nice, clean one, whereon pleasant things might be inscribed. He was not afraid of solitude, or likely to be bored with his own company. For the rest, he would buy some books, take some photographs, play golf, and live the simple life as he had lived it before in forests primeval. Also, he would make the acquaintance of Esmé Burgess.

Of course, he must steer clear of Miss Joy Vennable. That went without saying. Occasionally he might see her—at a safe distance; and he would hear of her from Burgess, who, evidently, was held in high esteem by Mrs. Owbridge. The landlady, moreover, gave promise of entertainment: a shrewd woman, masterful, and kindly: *une bonne gazette du pays*, as the French put it.

Let it be remembered that Hugo had shivered in the shadows for many weeks, and that a reaction, given a strong, vigorous man, was inevitable. He had escaped from bondage

only for a season, it is true. But he was still young enough to feel like a boy at home for the holidays after a dreary term of floggings and punishments. The boy has to go back, but he doesn't think of school till the holidays are nearly over.

When Hugo reached the cottage, he found a fire burning in his small bedroom, and a welcoming smile upon the face of Mrs. Owbridge, who asked if she might take the liberty of introducing her two lodgers to each other. This ceremony was the more necessary, inasmuch as the men would dine together. Hugo followed her into the sitting-room, with a queer feeling of nervousness. Having found sanctuary, he was loath to leave it. If Burgess recognized him!

The young fellow was playing Patience. He jumped up and shook hands. As soon as Mrs. Owbridge left the room, he said, with a laugh:

"When the old dear told me your name was Charters I thought you might be the bad man come down to hide his diminished head. But you spell your name differently?"

"We bear the same crest," said Hugo easily. "And I dare say my name was spelt originally as his is."

Later, after a plain but excellently cooked dinner, Burgess began to talk about himself, not vaingloriously, but as if the subject was a pleasant one. Hugo listened to an auto-

biographical sketch, perceiving that the young fellow spoke ardently of his obligations to others: notably a devoted father and mother, now dead, and an equally devoted grandmother, still alive. Of his triumphs at the University—a First in Classics, the gold medal for English verse, and some very remarkable speeches delivered at the Union—he said nothing.

Hugo heard of these later from other lips. Burgess talked well, occasionally with distinction, and with a felicity of phrase which provoked the remark:

"You are not a public-school man?"

"I am not. You are. Eton, eh?"

"Yes," said Hugo curtly.

"The stamp is unmistakable. My father kept me at home. I was delicate, and he had theories. He said that public-school boys never got the farther vision, never saw beyond the little circle of their own petty interests."

"I never saw beyond the Eton playing-fields."

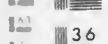
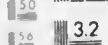
"That's what he meant. The result was that I"—he flushed and laughed—"well, I was brought up rather like a girl. At seventeen I was as innocent as Moses in the bulrushes; but I knew all about the Eastern Question, and could have outlined the foreign policy of the principal nations fairly accurately. Of course, I was, and am, a duffer at games."

"I see," said Hugo. This accounted for the



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"Sir Galahad" look, and the almost virginal radiance of the eyes.

"Tall, eager, a face to remember,
A flush that could change as the day;
A spirit that knew not December,
That brightened the sunshine of May."

He leaned forward and added: "You owe your father more than you think. Ten years hence you will understand what I mean. Is it indiscreet to ask what you are doing here?"

"Not at all. I overworked at Oxford, and my doctor prescribed fresh air and exercise. I am related to some of the Forest people: a dear old man, and——"

"His daughter."

"And his daughter. You saw us this morning. We wondered who you were. Joy—Miss Vennable, I mean—said, 'A sporting peer.'"

"How very complimentary!"

"It was, really. She's a country girl to the marrow, plays games, rides like Di Vernon, and does nearly all her father's work in the parish. Her mother was a Mottisfont, you know."

Hugo had never heard of the Mottisfont. Burgess explained volubly:

"They've lived here since the flood. My grandmother was an aunt of the present man, Sir Giles. The family never quite forgave her for marrying my grandfather, the poet, you know."

"You are a grandson of Robert Burgess?"

"Yes. My father was a leader-writer on the *Times*. The Mottisfont's will amuse you. They're typical Foresters, deep-rooted in the soil, with moss growing thick upon them. Not a single member of the family has ever distinguished himself. Amongst their family pictures you won't find a soldier, a sailor, a statesman, a painter, or even a writer of note. Strictly between ourselves, I think old families who can't justify existence by being of some service to the State which allows them such astonishing prerogatives ought to be set to break stones upon the road."

"You're a Socialist?"

"I belong to the New Brooms."

"I don't think I ever heard of the New Brooms."

"You will. We haven't had a chance yet. We're banded together to sweep the cobwebs out of the old parties, to take from each what is vital, and cast the rest to the void."

"Sounds well."

"Yes." The young fellow threw back his head and laughed. Although he used phrases obviously intended for the platform, there was nothing of the prig about him, and the detestable "Oxford manner" was happily absent. "We're Free Traders, anti-Jingoists, and sworn enemies of robbery, humbug, monopoly, and inefficiency. We're not demagogues, and we shall never lick the boots of the Great Un-

washed. Our first object is to remove lies and misrepresentations from practical politics, to present the naked truth to the public."

"Excellent. But the British public refuses to look at the nude. Does Miss Vennable think as you do?"

"She's mad keen—keen as I am. In her, you see, we get the Mottisfont strain of fox-hunter crossed with the Vennables. Her great-grandfather was a Lord Chancellor. Joy hunts the fox like a Mottisfont; but she hunts facts like a lawyer. You take me?"

"Perfectly."

"That girl is the queerest mixture of ancient and modern I ever came across. She's never been inside a theatre, but she hops in and out of problems that would muddle Bernard Shaw."

"Isn't he a bit of a skirter? Miss Vennable, probably, goes straight."

"That's it. I say, I'm so glad you've come. It's been a bit dull here when——"

"When you're not playing golf."

"Or shooting. I'm a licensee."

"A licensee?"

Burgess explained. In the Forest of Ys a man could take out a licence (on payment of twenty pounds) which entitled him to shoot game three days out of each week, from ten to four. Hen-pheasants must be spared.

"I've been at it a month. It's done me lots of good—made a new man of me. One has to have a beater at ten bob a week, and a dog.

I'm such a duffer that I don't bag much, but it's great fun, and one gets to know this wonderful forest."

"How do you become a licensee?"

"You apply to the Deputy Surveyor. There is no difficulty. They're glad enough to get the twenty pounds."

Hugo listened to a detailed description of a long, stern chase of a cock-pheasant, eventually slaughtered "on the floor"! The young fellow's artless prattle stirred vague enthusiasms in himself which he had supposed to be dead and buried. He found himself wondering whether it were possible to begin again: to join this youth, even in the pursuit of cock-pheasants, to explore with him this still virgin forest, to rekindle seemingly dead ashes.

When he lay in bed, wide awake, but easier in body and mind than he had felt for many months, he told himself that health, in a sense, was as contagious as disease. The forest was a mighty concrete example of regeneration. Outside, silence seemed to encompass all things, merely because his ears were too dull to register a million subtle vibrations. But the great cleansing forces of Nature never rested day or night. The foulest stream, percolating through a few yards of gravel, became pure and limpid, the rotting leaf was absorbed by the vigorous new growth: the first law of life this, but a law he had never applied to himself.

Three days later he was introduced to Joy by Burgess, with whom he had been walking round the golf-course. The girl was coming out of the club-house as the men were entering. From the tone of the young fellow's voice, Hugo knew that he had been the subject of discussion between Burgess and Joy. Instinctively, also, he was aware that the girl might be jealous of his intercourse with her cousin: an intercourse likely to become intimate. As soon as his eyes met hers, he noticed a curious expression of interrogation, partly physical, for one lid was slightly thicker than the other.

Here was a young lady who asked questions and would insist upon answers. At the same time, Hugo was struck by the informing sweetness and serenity of her face. Like many other men of his age and experience, he had come to distrust mere beauty, even to dislike it, when only skin-deep.

Comparing Angela with Joy—and a man has always one specimen woman with whom he compares others—Hugo decided that Joy was not a beauty, according to the Mayfair standard. At a ball or reception, at any indoor function, the world would stare at Angela and fail to notice Joy. Here, in the Forest, the two would meet on better terms, but, even here, to the superficial eye, Angela would reveal herself as the lovely siren, and Joy as the "nice-looking" girl.

She was tall and slenderly built. And she moved with that delightfully free, easy step which is a sure indication of health. Her skin was fine in texture, and delicately tinted by wind and sun. Angela possessed that wonderful warm, white complexion, regarded as exotic in England, which suggests the hothouse, and, possibly, treatment by a masseuse. Joy's face reminded one of a field that the Lord had blessed and then washed with dew.

They shook hands. Joy asked the eternal question never long absent from the lips of a Forester:

"Is this your first visit to the Forest?"

"Yes. Everybody here speaks of it as *the* Forest."

She laughed.

"Naturally; it is the one and only to us. You have seen other forests, perhaps? Yes. Don't you think this is the most beautiful of them all?"

Hugo hesitated. He was tempted to tease her; she looked so eager and so competent to champion anything or anybody she loved.

"There is Fontainebleau——"

"A French forest?"

"Have you been to Fontainebleau, Miss Vennable?"

"I've never been out of England, but Fontainebleau—— I see languishing ladies in powder and patches, cavaliers in white silk stockings, when I think of Fontainebleau."

"Fontainebleau was in existence before Watteau and Lancret, I can assure you."

"If you value your life——"

She hesitated, reflecting, perhaps, that she was going too fast with this stranger, of whom she knew nothing, except that Esmé Burgess had described him as "an awfully interesting fellow, who looks as if he'd had a knock."

"Perhaps I don't," said Hugo.

"If you do, be careful what you say about our Forest. Good - bye. Good - bye, Esmé. Remember that you are lunching with us the day after to-morrow."

She moved swiftly away. Both men watched her till she was lost in the dip of the road, which descended sharply to Hernshaw Parva.

"That's the best and prettiest girl in England," said Burgess with solemnity. "And the more you see of her, the more you'll like her. Mark my words!"

Hugo nodded. An impulse urged him to tell Burgess his real name. But an inevitable repugnance to speak of the past rose up and strangled this impulse. He had not sought the acquaintance of Joy. A formal introduction might mean anything or nothing. He would see that it meant nothing.

"I've talked to my cousin about you," he heard Burgess saying. "And I told her that she wouldn't dare to ride roughshod over you as she does over me."

"Ride roughshod? She has the kindest face."

"All the same, she tramples ruthlessly upon some of my opinions. She'll 'go canny' with you."

Hugo answered indifferently.

"Miss Vennable and I are not likely to see much of each other."

"You seem to forget that you're her parishioner. When I want to make her angry I call her the parson in petticoats. She knows everybody in Hernshaw Parva and Hernshaw Magna, and rules them with that adorable smile of hers. She'll rule you if she gets a chance."

"I shan't give her the chance."

CHAPTER VII

Two days later Joy Vennable and her father sat at breakfast. Everybody spoke of the Rector of Hernshaw Magna as a "dear man." He had the rosy-gilled, clean-shaven face, the turquoise-blue eyes, the white hair, the spotless linen, which are indissolubly associated with parsons of the old school, cadets of ancient families, who enter the Church because a "living" awaits them, which no prudent squire would like to bestow upon an alien. Hernshaw Magna, according to precedent, should have been bestowed upon a Mottisfont, who, although expected (for the Mottisfont's are prolific), never made his appearance. However, it was quite fitting that it should be given to George Vennable, because, rather late in life, he had married the eldest girl, Alicia, George being the grandson of the Lord Chancellor of whom mention has been made.

Those who knew the Rector intimately said to each other that he had never got over his great trouble; and they were not alluding, even indirectly, to the loss of Alicia (which took place when Joy was fourteen), but to a

more irremediable misfortune: the loss of the triumph which the publication of a *magnum opus* might have brought to him. This was a stupendous affair dealing with medieval common law and its relation to the constitutional history of England. The unhappy man was putting last touches to the work of a lifetime when Dorkin's now famous tomes dealing with the same subject fell from the printing-presses amidst thunders of applause. The Rector had quality enough to hide his chagrin and his manuscripts. He bought a butterfly-net. When we meet him, he had acquired a local reputation as the keenest entomologist in the Forest of Ys, with the most remarkable collection of lepidoptera to be found in Shropshire. He had also published a monograph upon fungi, with special reference to the rare species of boletus discovered by him, and named—as botanists know—*Edulis Vennabilis*.

The room in which father and daughter were consuming what ought to be the pleasantest meal of the day was long and low, opening by a French window on a pretty, sloping lawn. There was very little furniture, but all of it good. Some Hepplewhite chairs and a side-board, a curious old Spanish mahogany bureau, and a capacious cellaret of the same noble wood. Upon the walls hung a few coloured prints, mostly Morlands, and a large map of the Forest. Upon this map certain red circles contained initials, and a date. P.E. (June 14/97)

served to remind the Rector that he had captured a fine specimen of the Purple Emperor upon a piece of liver, which he had set as a bait for his imperial majesty.

Joy poured the tea out of a George II. teapot, and waited upon her father, who sat beside her. She knew exactly when he wanted the mustard, and boiled his egg to within a fraction of a second of three minutes.

After the death of Mrs. Vennable, Miss Lavinia Mottisfont offered to "mother" the orphan. She and her sister, Miss Priscilla, lived at The Lodge, a small house upon the edge of Mottisfont Park. Miss Lavinia, albeit of an easy and forgiving nature, could never forget that George Vennable had left so momentous a decision to Joy, and Joy had actually said, "Never!" Afterwards, in rare moments of expansion, Miss Lavinia would say, with a sigh: "When my poor dear sister was laid to rest in the churchyard of Hernshaw Magna, I observed to Priscilla, who was with me: 'Heaven help the child, for her earthly father will *not* do his part.'"

Joy never told Miss Lavinia that while her mother lay a-dying (being a true Mottisfont, Mrs. Vennable expired leisurely, with due consideration for those about her), she had whispered: "Look after your father better than I have," an injunction obeyed implicitly, in spirit and letter. For eight years (Joy was now twenty-two) she had ministered faithfully

and willingly to George Vennable, and he had not the smallest idea of the magnitude and loyalty of that service. Joy was his dear, good child, really quite a little woman. He would have to think about finding her a husband some day. Meanwhile——

Meanwhile her clever little fingers could set butterflies to perfection.

The Rector chipped his egg and blinked pleasantly at Joy.

"Well, my dear, what have I to do to-day?"

Joy instantly produced a neat notebook, and opened it.

"Pragson will be here at ten about the repairs to the vestry; at eleven you promised to call on Martha Lovell. I could see her if you would rather——"

"By all means. She would sooner see you than me. Who wouldn't?"

Joy continued:

"Esmé Burgess is coming to lunch. I have a brace of partridges, and that celery salad you like, with bits of apple in. After lunch I shall carry Esmé off to play golf, and you will have the whole afternoon to yourself. We dine at the Park."

"Last time we dined there your uncle gave us marsala instead of sherry. I think he saw that I only took one glass. He told me at dessert that it stood him in eighteen-and-six a dozen. I said he had paid too much for it. Since your uncle was ordered nothing but

whisky and water, the wine you get in his house when there isn't a party is positively——"

"Father——"

"My dear?"

"Have you seen Esmé's friend, Mr. Reginald Charters?"

"No, my dear."

"I think you ought to call on him. He is lodging with Sarah Owbridge, and he has taken out a Forest licence. Esmé raves about him."

"My dear, if he is Esmé's friend, write a note."

"You ought to write it, father."

"Nonsense! Tell Esmé, with my compliments, to bring his friend to-day. What name did you say?"

"Charters. Reginald Charters."

"Ah—a good name! One of the Charteris of Saffron Charteris, I'll be bound."

"He spells his name C-h-a-r-t-e-r-s."

"Does he? What a pity! Well, ask him to luncheon. Perhaps he plays bridge. A slice of ham, my dear."

Joy cut two thin slices.

"He looks as if he played bridge," she murmured.

"If he does play bridge," said the Rector, "I shall have a crow to pick with you for not bringing him to my notice before."

One of George Vennable's grievances was

that so few "Foresters" played bridge. The Mottisfont, for instance, preferred loto."

"I did not bring him to your notice before because—— More tea, father?"

"Thank you; half a cup, my dear. Go on!"

"You see, I knew so little about him."

"Do you know any more now?"

"Esmé says he's a man of the world."

"Why is his name familiar to me?"

"That shocking divorce case."

"Yes, yes, to be sure." He rose up. "And Pragson, you say, is coming at ten? A very tiresome fellow; always gets his own way by pestering. I have the feeling at times that I could break all the commandments, particularly the sixth, to get rid of him."

"Perhaps I'd better see him, dad. He doesn't get over me."

She adjusted her father's tie, brushed a crumb from his well-cut coat, patted his cheek, and kissed it.

"My dear, I think you *shall* see Pragson. I am particularly busy this morning. I am moving the Chalk-hill blues into another cabinet. Yes, yes; tell Pragson that I insist on tiles; he insists on slates."

Joy produced her notebook. "Tiles for ever," she said with a cheerful smile.

"And you'll write a note to your cousin?"

"I may nip down to the cottage to see him. A brace of partridges will do so nicely for four people."

"Be sure to find out about the bridge."

With that the Rector went his way, with the pleasant smile upon his face of one who has broken the back of duty, and is looking forward to a delightful occupation. He was greatly beloved in his tiny parish because, as Mrs. Owbridge said, he left hard-working folks in peace. If they fell ill he sent wine and jellies to them; he never preached out of the pulpit, and not at length in it; having private means he was able (and most willing) to subscribe handsomely to local charities. Always he took the chair at cricket and football dinners, and never failed to make a most amusing and humorous speech, received with ear-splitting guffaws. The urchins adored him, because he bought caterpillars and took an entirely unlawful interest in rare birds' eggs.

As soon as the door had closed behind him Joy's smile faded, giving place to a serious expression. She glanced at the bureau, where she wrote all her letters. It would save time to scribble a note— On the other hand, Martha Lovell lived at Hernshaw Parva.

She opened the bureau and closed it. A charming smile broke across her face, making her eyes sparkle, so that the brown flecks in them danced like the specks of gold in Eau de Dantzig. Household duties engrossed her for half an hour, and then she engaged Pragson in mortal combat, and defeated him utterly.

"I 'ad 'oped as how I'd 'a' seen your father, miss," said the crushed Pragson.

"Yes, Pragson; I know you were counting on that. You upset my father with your obstinacy. You needn't shake your head, you *do*. Why, it makes him feel wicked. It's bad enough to be wicked, but to make others wicked, to turn a clergyman of the Church of England into a would-be murderer, is simply awful."

"Lor, miss, you do carry on!"

"If you have listened to what I've said, my breath has not been wasted." The austerity fled from her face as she concluded, with a gay laugh: "I've found that bothersome boy of yours a place at the Park. He's to have fifteen shillings a week, and Sir Giles's coachman will teach him to ride. Now, you bundle back to your work, and leave me to mine."

"Miss Joy, the boy's mother will sit down and cry like a child when I tell 'er that."

"I hope she'll do nothing so silly. William is a bright boy. All your children have brains, Pragson."

"Well," said Pragson gloomily, "they can't thank their pore mother for that. Mornin', miss, and thank you kindly."

Stables and garden were visited. Joy had a couple of carrots for the brown mare she hunted, and a biscuit for the foxhound puppy at walk. Followed by the puppy and her bull-terrier, she marched down to Hernshaw Parva, about half a mile distant.

The day was softly grey, one of those delightful autumnal mornings which bring to mind the summer that is past rather than the winter that is coming. A few white frosts had brought the leaves to the ground, but not all of them, enough to show the main branches of the trees and their entrancing curves. The flames burned low in the beeches, their glow warming pleasantly the eye. The yews began to assert themselves. Some of them were old as the hills. Out of them—so Joy told herself—had been fashioned the longbows of Agincourt and Crécy.

“Mornin’, miss.”

“Morning, Tom.”

Tom Henbest lived in rather a ramshackle, thatched cottage at Hernshaw Parva. In London he would have been styled a “caslety” man. Like so many foresters, he did odd jobs—being, in turn, chimney-sweep, gatherer of bracken, and forest beater. He was a hard-working fellow, with a weakness for ale.

“Got a job, Tom?”

“Yas, miss. I be beater to Mister Charters—him as lodges with the Widow Owbridge. Seemin’ly a very nice, up-and-down gen’leman he be.”

“I’m glad to hear this, Tom.”

“Yas, miss, so be I. Us hits it off fust rate.”

“You’re not shooting to-day?”

“No, miss.”

Joy whistled up the dogs and pushed on. She had half a dozen words with old Martha Lovell, who was really too deaf to hear them, but pretended she did. Martha's roof leaked. This was the landlord's affair, but as a rule such small jobs passed through Joy's hands. A note from her to Preshaw, the agent (who happened to be a bachelor), generally brought that gentleman hot-foot to the Rectory, where he was told his duty, and invited to do it in language pleasant but imperative. Upon occasion the matter was too important to be settled off-hand by an understrapper. For instance, the condition of some pigsties in Hernshaw Parva appealed to every nose that passed them. Joy rode over to the Park to interview Sir Giles.

"My dear, I can't afford it. Bless my soul! you know that I can only just pay my way nowadays."

"Sell some timber; it wants thinning in the park."

"Joy, you take a great deal upon yourself."

"I have to. Now, uncle, you know how frightfully busy I am, and you know, in your heart of hearts, that those pigsties in Hernshaw Parva are a disgrace. If we had an epidemic, where would you be?"

"Child, I must insist upon managing my own property."

"Your own property! Uncle, you can't take that prehistoric view. You hold it in trust.

Your own property! You said that as if you had created it."

Sir Giles, on such occasions, would puff and blow, eyeing his niece out of a pair of too prominent eyes. Then he would say, pursing his under lip:

"George Vennable calls himself a Conservative, but the Rad in him pops out in you."

"Call me any names you like, but for the honour of the Mottisfont, let those sties be taken away."

"I'll sleep on it."

It is relevant to mention that the sties at Hernshaw Parva had not been removed.

When Joy reached the cottage, Mrs. Owbridge said that Burgess was in his room, at work. Joy nodded, adding quickly:

"And Mr. Charters?"

"He's diggin' in my garden."

"Digging in your garden?"

"Miss Joy, we all of us does the things we likes to do, pretend as we may we don't. You take a heap o' comfort playin' rector o' this parish. Oh yes, you do. And, grumble as I may, I take pleasure in a hard day's washin'. As for a spring-cleanin', why, it's a reel tonic to me. Mr. Charters likes diggin', although, to be sure, he's no great hand at it."

"Please tell Mr. Burgess that I want to see him for a couple of minutes."

"Like as not he'll throw a slipper at my

head. But, there, you always will have your own way."

She bustled off, and Joy edged towards the window. Yes; at the back of the garden, behind the cabbages, this extraordinary man was hard at work. If he handled his spade like an amateur, there was muscle, plenty of it, on the arms that held it. She eyed him furtively but attentively. Certainly he had an interesting face, not so handsome as her cousin's, but with stronger-marked features. The nose was pronouncedly aquiline; the head Norman in shape. She recalled her first phrase—"a sporting peer." She knew one sporting peer, a famous master of hounds, who came down at Easter for an extra three weeks' hunting. He was not really happy till he had helped to kill a May fox. He, too, had an aquiline nose, a brown-red complexion, a slightly prominent chin, and clear grey eyes. Also, he was tall and thin, the ideal figure for a horseman. Hugo, however, on closer inspection, revealed qualities other than those conspicuous in a fine horseman. His forehead, slightly lined, indicated the thinker; the lids of the eyes, rather heavy, suggested a dreamer. Perhaps the most remarkable thing of all was an unmistakable expression of sadness.

"Hullo, Joy!"

"Esmé, father is too busy to call on Mr. Charters, but he hopes that he will waive ceremony, and come to us to-day with you."

"Oh!" said Burgess.

Joy laughed.

"Perhaps Mr. Charters will exhibit more enthusiasm."

"That's just it," said Burgess. "The fact is, Joy, that he's one of the nicest men I ever met. I liked him the first day I saw him, and I've gone on liking him more and more, but—don't laugh—I believe he's a woman-hater."

"What?"

"Women are beyond his horizon. He's growing a beard."

"How stupid of him!"

"I've a theory that some woman or other has let him down pretty heavily. Look here: I've talked to him about you, and he's a good listener——"

"That's why you like him."

"Perhaps. Anyway, he's never once suggested a threesome at golf."

"Why should he?"

"Why should he?"

A dozen impassioned reasons bubbled from the young fellow's lips. Joy silenced them as she was in the way of silencing too riotous puppies.

"Suppose you go out and give him father's message. By the way, does he play bridge?"

"Odd you should ask that! He showed me some problems only last night."

"That settles it. Tell him that father won't take a refusal, beard or no beard."

Burgess shrugged his shoulders and walked into the garden. From behind the curtain Joy discreetly watched the two men. She could not hear a word, but the stranger's gestures, the shrug of the broad shoulders, the shake of the head, were not reassuring.

A woman-hater? Why?

Burgess came back with a rueful smile on his lips.

"Charters declines your father's kind invitation."

Joy stared at him, hardly believing her ears. Then a faint blush came and went upon her cheeks.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. Then, as Burgess said nothing, she added, with a sub-acid laugh: "If he prefers digging in the garden, and cultivating horrid, stubbly beards, there is nothing more to be said."

She turned and went out. Burgess could hear her rating Tomboy, the foxhound puppy, who had treed Sarah Owbridge's black cat.

The young man smiled, ran upstairs two steps at a time, seized a cap, and rejoined his cousin.

"I'm coming with you, Joy."

"But your work—the article for the *Saxon*?"

"I'd chuck anything to be with you."

"But"—a dimple showed near her mouth, and the kind light came back into her eyes—"you are lunching with us, playing golf with

me this afternoon, and I suppose you're dining at the Park?"

"Yes; I hope to take you into dinner."

"Go back to work."

"I work to improve myself, and nothing so improves me as being with you; but if I bore you——"

Real anxiety underlay his pleasant tone. In his fine eyes shone an almost dog-like entreaty. Joy melted.

"Of course you can come if you want to. But you must promise one thing."

"Anything!"

"Rash youth! Swear that you will never grow a beard."

"All right: I swear."

The man digging in Mrs. Owbridge's cabbage-patch saw the pair walk off together, heard a ringing laugh, the laugh that derides black care, and the joyous barking of the terrier as he gambolled in front of his adored mistress. Youth and maid lingered for a moment upon the bridge which crosses the Jordan. They did not look back: why should they? The world and the glory of it lay in front of them, like some enchanted glade in this ancient Forest, winding on and on, revealing new and unexpected beauties at every turn. And to them direction was nothing, movement was everything. And whichever path they trod, eventually they would reach the high ground, the wind-swept moor, whence the sea might be discerned

by clear eyes, the sea and sky mingling in a mysterious embrace, the marriage of air and water, the two elements indissolubly connected ever since the world began.

Burgess and Joy left the bridge and began to ascend the hill which leads to Hernshaw Magna. A moment later their figures were lost to view.

Hugo glanced at the stream flowing past the garden, hurrying to the sea, and prattling as it went of the faces and places which had been reflected in its clear waters.

Then he squared his shoulders, and drove his sharp spade into the yielding earth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE dinner-party at the Park was a large one. The guests assembled in the long saloon, where Sir Giles, arrayed in the scarlet coat with green facings of the Forest Hunt, received them with old-fashioned courtesy. The Pundles of Pundle Green, the Bungays of Slufter, the Lovibonds of Broomie, and the Jallands of Queen's Jalland, were present. These local magnates, men and women alike, had long lost touch with that world of Mayfair in which young Mrs. Giles Mottisfont, the wife of the eldest son, sparkled so brilliantly. Colonel Jalland, it is true, was in the habit of going to town once a month to have his hair cut; Major Lovibond never missed his regimental dinner; but for the most part they and their wives and daughters remained at home year in and year out, well satisfied with the station of life to which it had pleased an all-wise Providence to call them.

Esmé Burgess came with the Vennables, and was captured at once by Mrs. Giles. If she had not been born a Savernake, with a nice fortune at her own disposal, the Foresters

might have condemned her as worldly and frivolous. Sir Giles refused to listen to a word against his smart daughter-in-law, because she had given to him two handsome grandsons. Life at best being such an uncertain affair, Sir Giles hoped that there would be two more; but young Giles, who was in the Guards, electrified the aunts by affirming positively that two were enough.

The aunts were present: Miss Priscilla in lavender silk, wearing some fine black lace; Miss Lavinia in grey. Upon their thin, slightly flushed faces, in their pale-blue eyes, in their erect, uncompromising deportment, might be detected a certain protest. They were conversing (Miss Priscilla's word) with Mrs. Bungay of Slufter, but their glances rested upon young Mrs. Giles and Esmé Burgess. Whenever Mrs. Giles laughed Miss Priscilla was unable to prevent a tiny frown showing itself between her delicately pencilled arched eyebrows; and Miss Lavinia at the same moment would adjust the Indian shawl about her neck, as if she were sensible of a chill.

"What a lovely gown Mrs. Giles has on!" said Mrs. Bungay, realizing that she was feeling unduly heated in a green velvet familiar for more than a decade to all Foresters.

"From the little I can see of it, my dear, it was not chosen for its wearing qualities," said Miss Priscilla.

Mrs. Giles, indeed, was arrayed in pale-blue

tulle. Around her slim white neck was a dog-collar of diamonds and turquoises. A diamond and turquoise aigrette quivered in her blonde hair. And yet she told everybody that she never brought her jewels into the country! What she wore upon this occasion would have reroofed the Park (sadly in need of it), and rebuilt a score of insanitary cottages. Such, at least, was Miss Priscilla's computation.

"Is that Esmé Burgess?" murmured Mrs. Bungay. "We hear he has distinguished himself greatly at Oxford. How handsome he is, but *so* delicate-looking!"

"He was brought up on artificial food," replied Miss Priscilla tartly.

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Bungay, who had nourished adequately, and without any extraneous assistance, four sons and five daughters. "I wonder it was permitted."

"We knew nothing of it at the time," said Miss Lavinia. "The intercourse between the Park and No. 2, Cheyne Walk——"

"Terrace, Lavinia. It was Carlyle who lived in Cheyne Walk."

"To be sure! Well, as I was saying, the intercourse between the Park and No. 2, Cheyne Terrace, was never of a very intimate nature."

"Never!" Miss Priscilla confirmed the statement. "I lunched there once: the veal cutlets were overdone. Esmé's father was a mere newspaper man. He always returned home, I believe, long after midnight."

She rose as a portly butler announced dinner in a voice smooth as mayonnaise sauce. Sir Giles offered his arm to Lady Albinia Jalland, and led the way through the red drawing-room and entrance-hall into the dining-room beyond.

Before we follow them it may be as well to touch lightly upon the Mottisfontes and their history. The father of Sir Giles spent much time and a considerable sum of money in tracing his descent to one John de la Mothe, Knight of the Shire of Slowshire, in the reign of Henry III. In his admirable and indispensable work, Sir Bernard Burke, to whom the nobility and gentry of Britain owe so incalculable a debt, has traced filiation from this De la Mothe to one George Mott, who appears to have obtained a deed of gift to a field near Hernshaw Magna, in which bubbled a remarkably fine spring, spoken of in still existing charters as Mott Hys Fonte, or Fontaine. Hence, by an easy transition, we come to Giles, or Gilles, de Mottysfonte (grandson of George Mott), who married an heiress of the Pundle family, and held a lucrative appointment under the Crown during the reign of Elizabeth.

A historian of the Forest has written of Giles de Mottysfonte that he was "well versed in the arts which commend a subject to his Sovereign." The particle was dropped during the troublous times of the Civil War, and never reassumed.

To make up for its loss, the Merry Monarch (possibly in a moment of inebriety) conferred a baronetcy upon the then head of this ancient family.

Ever since the days of George Mott the family seems to have justified its motto, *Probus et Tenax*, by acquiring, principally through judicious marriages, as much land as possible, and then refusing, under any circumstances, to part with an acre of it. In addition, an extraordinary number of forest rights are attached to the manor: pasturage for all commonable animals, levant or couchant; right of marl-digging, right of turbary, and of digging and cutting heath and furze; right of fifteen loads of good fuel, and so on and so forth. . . .

At dinner young Mrs. Giles prattled cleverly. She possessed the rare gift of believing, and of making others believe, that her *obiter dicta* were of value to society. She knew quite intimately some celebrities, whose autographs might be found in a book of "ghosts" which she carried about with her, and she quoted these great men as invariably agreeing with her.

"I sent for Towler at once," she would say—alluding airily to the famous Regius Professor—"and he said: 'My dear, I think just as you do.'" Or, "I sat next to General Pomeroy at dinner the other night, and told him frankly that I could not quite swallow all

the clauses of the new Army Scheme. And he said: 'Mollie, nobody knows better than I do that some of them are indigestible.'

As a rule, she delighted in shocking the aunts by discussing with astonishing frankness books and plays never mentioned in the Forest. With Burgess sitting beside her, she plunged into a discussion concerning the French play *Education du Prince*. Young Giles stirred uneasily in his chair, and stroked his chin, a gesture indicating nervousness. Had he possessed greater intelligence or moderate powers of observation, he would have known that not a soul at his father's table had ever heard of the play, except himself, his wife, and Burgess. He made a feeble protest.

"My dear Mollie, I wanted to take you out after the first act. Don't you think—er—er——"

"Yes; he wanted to take me out." She captured the attention of everybody present. "Of course, I refused to go. A married woman with two children is not a Mademoiselle Nitouche. And, besides, girls over twenty ought to have their eyes opened. Why, I asked the dear Archbishop. 'Don't you think,' I said, 'that girls ought to know more than they do?' And he said most emphatically: 'Certainly!'" She looked round the table. "Joy is the only girl here, and she's twenty-three——"

"Twenty-two."

"So I can go on, if Gilie will stop stroking his chin. Thank you, dear. Where was I? Oh, of course, I was talking to Esmé. Nobody need listen who doesn't want to. The aunts can put their fingers into their ears. This breaking of the Seventh Commandment——"

"Giles——"

"Yes, George?"

"Is this champagne '92 or '93?"

"It's '92. I haven't five dozen left."

"What a pity! A fine wine, a very fine wine."

He sipped his wine, smiling pleasantly. But everybody knew that Mrs. Giles had been snubbed by George Vennable. The aunts regarded him gratefully, their thin cheeks suffused with faint blushes. George, to be sure, had his faults. He was Laodicean; and, for a clever man, the time he wasted pursuing butterflies and gathering toadstools was really lamentable, but he had the nicest sense of what was or was not a fitting subject of conversation at a dinner-table.

Mrs. Giles gazed at the Rector with sparkling eyes; then she went on easily:

"Dear Uncle George, a stain is not removed by putting a vase of flowers over it. Discussion, honest discussion, is antiseptic. Charles Gosling asked if he might steal that phrase from me. There was the Charteris case. It was discussed by everybody. And I happen to know for a fact that the publicity scared two

naughty friends of my own into behaving themselves."

Sir Giles raised his voice, which rumbled when he was perturbed. In the presence of his daughter-in-law he always had a slightly startled expression, a vaguely alarmed smile, as if he feared to be driven, against his will, into pastures outside the Forest of Ys.

He told himself that the sooner the talk got back to hunting the better, and if a fence, in pale blue tulle, lay between him and hounds, let it be jumped without delay.

"The Charteris case was shocking;" he nodded his massive head. "But I read it—from beginning to end."

Sir Giles made this announcement with imposing solemnity.

The aunts felt convinced that, because their dear brother had read it, the case, so to speak, had become Bowdlerized. Their faces assumed an air of pleased attention.

"I read it," repeated Sir Giles; "and it—um—fortified—yes, fortified my conviction that idleness is at the root of all evil. I wrote that in my copy-book when I was a lad at school." The aunts nodded their heads. Dear Giles always expressed himself so nicely. "The three unhappy persons in this case," continued the speaker, avoiding Mrs. Giles's slightly derisive smile, "had nothing to do, so it appeared to me—correct me if I am mistaken—had absolutely nothing to do, except to waste

time and money. Show me a house, large or small, where time and money are squandered, and I will show you—um——”

“The devil in possession,” said George Vennable.

“Thank you, George. I don't think there is anything more to be said. We killed a good fox yesterday.”

But the fox started by Mrs. Giles was only scotched, not killed. As soon as dinner was over, Joy sat down on the sofa beside Mrs. Giles, and said, with slightly heightened colour :

“I think as you do, Mollie, about stains and vases of flowers. I read that Charteris case.”

“*You* did?”

“Yes. I live down here; I hardly ever leave the Forest; my only chance of knowing what is going on in the world is through my reading.”

“All the same——”

“I know what you would say. You will believe me when I tell you that I don't, as a rule, read such cases, but this excited so much attention. And I'm glad I read it. Even in this village squalid, unspeakable facts must be faced. And how can ignorance deal with such things? This Charteris case opened my eyes to what I didn't know before.”

“And what was that?”

“That a man, apparently popular, young, fascinating, could be a perfect devil.”

"Did you think a perfect devil went about with a black face and showing a cloven foot and forked tail?"

"In a sense, I suppose I did."

"What a child you are still!"

"No; that case killed the child in me."

"Years ago I knew Hugo Charteris slightly," said Mrs. Giles.

"And you never had a glimpse of the cloven foot?"

"No."

"What was he like?"

"My dear, don't speak of him as if he was dead."

"Of course he is dead."

"He has gone abroad. He is very much alive. And he has twenty thousand a year. What has that to do with it? A great deal. Hugo Charteris will marry Mrs. Tempest, who is a darling, and society will be kind to them. After all, this is a Christian country—for the rich."

"Mollie, I hate you when you talk like that."

"Because you are half Moutisfont. Did you see poor Gilie stroking his chin at dinner? He was quite cross when I told him that I had danced with Hugo Charteris before I was married. He danced beautifully."

"Did he make——"

"No, he didn't."

"Isn't it an odd coincidence?—there's a man

called Reginald Charters down here, a friend of Esmé's. He spells his name differently, and hates women."

"No relation, evidently, to the perfect devil?"

"That's the only thing I know in his favour."

CHAPTER IX

HUGO was reading and smoking in the cosy little sitting-room when Esmé Burgess came in after the dinner at the Park. The young fellow glowed with excitement.

"Pleasant evening?"

"Very! I took in Joy. Mrs. Giles Mottisfont made the aunts sit up. Afterwards Cousin Lavinia said to me it was rather sad to see how little real interest dear Mollie took in Hernshaw and Mottisfont."

"Mollie? You are going too fast."

"Young Mrs. Giles Mottisfont," explained Burgess. "Giles was lucky to get her. Certainly, she's smartened him up, but inside he's Mottisfont to the core. I never saw such a family—never! And the Jallands and Bungays are nearly as bad. They think this lovely Forest was created for them."

"Aren't they more than half right?"

Burgess filled his pipe. He was astride his hobby-horse, and ready for a gallop. Hugo smiled as he watched the eager face, aflame with enthusiasm. He found himself wondering why he was so drawn to Burgess. Was it

merely charm of manner, good looks, or that personal magnetism which is so much harder to analyse? He liked to hear the boy talk—not for what he said, but for the way he said it.

“Their selfishness is astounding, Charters. It is, indeed. And they don't know it. George Vennable and Sir Giles believe that they are doing their duty as squire and parson, but between ourselves the parish would go to pot if Joy left it.

“Mrs. Giles Mottisfont would like to carry off Joy to Hans Crescent, where she has the most charming house, but Joy loathes smart people, although she's rather fond of Mollie. I dare say you've discovered that Joy has not an easy time of it. The aunts, for instance, disapprove of her. I heard Cousin Priscilla—the old cat!—saying to Mrs. Pundle after dinner that Joy's manner was not ‘engaging.’ Joy started a hockey-club for the villagers. The aunts and all right-feeling people think the lower classes ought to work from six in the morning till nine at night. They have a nice little parlour-maid, as good as gold. Joy asked if she might play hockey for one hour, once a week. The aunts were indignant. According to them, Esther—that's the name of the maid—can find relaxation, after polishing the silver and waiting at table, in ‘taking her needle,’ as they put it, and doing some plain sewing in the housekeeper's room. Esther has to part her hair in the middle, brush the natural

wave out of it with a wet brush, and tie it into the tightest of knots behind her head. Bah! However, the New Brooms are going to change all that."

"What do the aunts think of you, Burgess?"

"I'm not sound!" He threw back his head and laughed gaily. "That's Sir Giles's great word. He's—sound! Colonel Jalland, who can hardly spell, is—sound. Old Admiral Pundle, who's not fit to fly his flag in a Christmas pantomime, is—sound! Why? Because they all swear solemnly by Joe Chamberlain and Protection. They know nothing of political economy; they couldn't answer a single question on the subject that any intelligent boy might put to them. They are not moved an inch by the fact that the professors, the men without an axe to grind, are in favour of Free Trade; but they cherish the conviction that Protection will bolster up the agricultural interest, and enhance the value of their land. They detested Joe till he promised to add to their incomes. Now he's as 'sound' as they are."

"I wonder you're asked to dine at the Park."

"I'm a kinsman; that counts. And Joy can do anything with Sir Giles, except to make him part with money. I say, Charters, you were rather a churl this morning."

"Sorry."

"George Vennable hoped you would make a fourth at bridge."

There was a pause; then Hugo said slowly:

"He is very kind, but I didn't come here to entertain or to be entertained." He rubbed his chin, adding genially: "I'm not going to carry an unshaved face into Miss Vennable's drawing-room."

"You'd enjoy talking to Joy."

"I'd sooner listen to you."

"If you really knew her——"

"It's quite impossible for a man to know, really, any woman."

Burgess laughed with the complacency of youth.

"She's fresh as foam and crystal clear."

"You're green as the grass, if you think you see through her."

"I've studied her pretty well." He laughed, and then, blushing, said abruptly: "Of course, you know how it is with me?"

"Yes."

"I could lie all night upon the doormat outside her room."

"I believe you could and would."

Hugo spoke calmly, but he was thinking with passion: "My God! How I envy you! To be as you are—fresh, ardent, clean—and to fall in love with such a creature!" Then aloud, in the same quiet tone, he continued:

"You're fortunate, Burgess; you're keen about your work, and you've fallen in love with the right woman."

With that he got up, and, bidding Burgess good-night, went out of the room.

Next morning, when they met at breakfast, Hugo spoke of nothing but their prospects for a day's sport. Licensees are allowed to hunt in couples. Two men joining forces, each contributing a beater and a dog, are not only likely to kill more game, but to kill time much more amusingly. Moreover, Burgess had discovered that Hugo had an astonishing knowledge of the habits and habitats of wild things, and a willingness to impart that knowledge to a pupil. The long tramps, the good and ill-fortune of the day, the intimate hours spent in discussing their sport: these had ripened acquaintance into friendship in less than a fortnight.

At ten o'clock they met Tom Henbest and Jasper Mowland, Burgess's beater, at the Gibbet. Years before the gibbet had been cut down by a drunken sailor, but the hole in which it had stood still remained. Upon it had swung the skeleton of the last Englishman hung in chains. Tom's grandfather, it seemed, had known this scoundrel, who had robbed an old woman and then set fire to her cottage.

"Granfer used to tap the skull, he did, and allus he'd say: 'How bee'st, Jim?' And then the tits 'd fly out o' the eye-sockets. Never no more than that: 'How bee'st, Jim?'"

"Ugh!" said Burgess.

"There's a many wouldn't come nigh here now," said Tom. "Jaspar wouldn't—would 'ee, Jaspar?"

"I'd as lief go round t'other way," admitted Mr. Mowland. He also, like Henbest, was a true Forester, a gatherer of bracken, a taker of odd jobs, with gipsy blood in his veins, and gipsy superstitions in his long, melancholy head. Mowland refused to soap his face on Good Friday (possibly on other days also), because there is a legend among Forest gipsies that Christ, upon the day of His Crucifixion, had some soapsuds thrown in His face.

It was a still December morning. The Forest, so much as could be seen of it, wore its beautiful winter livery of blue and silver. Against the pale amber of the southern sky, the tops of the Scotch firs looked like exquisite point lace. Distant woods were of palest cobalt; the yews and hollies in the foreground stood out in solid indigo. Between these two tints were revealed the subtlest gradations of colour. Much rain had fallen during the preceding week, and out of the alders in the bottoms a woodcock would surely be flushed; farther on one was likely to get a shot at a jack-snipe.

They passed through a noble wood of oaks planted by William III. for the purpose of making battleships. Not very far away the first clump of firs, set out about a hundred years later, stood boldly against the sky.

Burgess was familiar with the history of the Forest of Ys; and Hugo, for his part, pointed out a hen-harrier beating the ground like a setter provided with wings. Henbest now and again contributed some curious item. He called Hugo's attention to the innumerable thorn-bushes growing beside the young oaks.

"They thorns keep the deer and cattle from the tender trees," he said. "But when the oak's big enough to look after hisself the thorn, seemin'ly, dies."

"The fittest survive."

"When they be left alone," said Henbest. "There used to be a be-utiful wood o' yews near here. They cut un down, they did, and planted out they beastesses o' firs instead."

"Why do they do this planting?" Hugo asked. "Surely the natural trees of the Forest propagate themselves?"

"Ha, ha!" Burgess replied. "That's a bone of contention. My uncle, a verderer, contends that they don't; but of course they do. I can show you half a dozen copses of young oaks and beeches within half a mile, but I can't show them to Sir Giles, because he turns his eyes the other way. Your true Forester never listens to an argumēt, or looks at proofs, which might disturb opinions that he sucked in with his mother's milk."

"We'd better spread out here," said Henbest.

They worked upwards, to begin with, shooting a rabbit or two put out by the indefatigable

spaniel. Hugo's setter Don, a sagacious beast, disdained rabbits. He worked steadily, ranging in front of his master, continually pausing and looking back, awaiting the wave of the hand. The four men walked in line, beating the bushes steadily. There is not an enormous quantity of game in the Forest, and what may be found must not be suffered to escape.

Crossing the gutter (all streams in the Forest are called gutters) out of Bimley's, they began to explore the thickets of Queen North. Don exhibited great keenness, for pheasants eat the acorns and beechnuts in Queen North. Don was at his best in pursuit of a running cock-pheasant. The spaniel would rush in where an angel might fear to tread, and flush the noble bird when the guns were seventy yards away. Not so Don. He advanced cautiously, and stood like a rock when near the quarry.

"It's a bird!" proclaimed Henbest, in tones of authority. To a Forest-beater a "bird" means a cock-pheasant; so in the Far West men speak of a bottle of wine—meaning champagne.

No bird was to be seen, but Don's movements endorsed Tom's words. The dog made sure of his point, and then, quivering with excitement, followed the line (if the line is straight it is probably a "bird"; a hen-pheasant runs in a circle). Don moved swiftly ahead, turning neither to right nor left (it is

all-important not to lose sight of your dog in a thicket of thorns and hollies). The men plunged on and through Queen North into the open plain between that and Rakes Brake. This was the place to flush and shoot the bird.

"Good dog! good dog!"

Out of breath, spent with a run of more than three-quarters of a mile, torn by thorns, bespattered with mud, the men approached the setter, now standing as if graven in granite outside a thick holly-bush. Hugo took the right, and motioned to Burgess to command the left; Henbest attacked the holly-bush with his stick.

Whir-r-r-r!

Bang!

Burgess fired at and missed a—hen.

"I thought it was a cock," he explained.

"So did Don," said Hugo.

"And it flew across the sun. What a sell!"

"What a glorious run!"

Balm, however, awaited them—not in Gilead, but in Rakes Brake bog, where two snipe were bagged. Here they saw a fox calmly sitting on a dry tussock in the bog, watching them intently, and with an air that he need not disturb himself. A few minutes later, in Broomie, a woodcock rose silently, and was just flitting out of sight behind a holly-bush when Hugo brought him to grass with a clever shot. Henbest was of opinion that duck might be found on some of the splashes between

Broomie and Slufter. A careful reconnaissance was made. Hugo carried a pair of small Zeiss glasses, and presently was able to announce that six mallard were lying upon a pool some three hundred yards ahead.

"Johnnie Frost ha' brought they beauties in," said Tom, wiping the sweat from his lean face. Jaspur Mowland had lost his look of melancholy; his long, convincing nose snuffed the air.

"Us'll never get nigh 'em," he declared.

A notable stalk followed.

They crawled, slithering through the whin and heather, to within seventy yards of the splash. It being impossible to crawl nearer without being seen, the two beaters were instructed to fetch a compass, to approach from the other side, and endeavour to drive the ducks over the guns. Two holly-bushes furnished screens. Alas! Luck, changing inexorably, ordained that the mallard, on rising, should elect to fly over the heads of the beaters and, instead of circling, as is their kindly habit, take a bee-line due south.

Luncheon offered compensation.

Mowland unstrapped the bag, which held sandwiches, bread and cheese, apples, and a flask. Tom Henbest did not refuse a drop of whisky. Mowland, with a discouraging smile, shook his head.

"Father died o' drink, 'e did. Doctor said so—yas, 'e did."

"Doctor told no lie, neither," remarked Tom cheerily. "Allus ready for a pot were your father, if summun else 'ud pay for it. Fine upstannin' sinner 'e was, when sober."

"Mother made me take the pledge when I were nine year old," continued Mowland meditatively. "I kep' it faithful ever since."

He addressed Burgess, with an eye to back-sheesh.

"Don't 'ee get too vain about that, Jaspar. Taste fer strong drink do go, seemin'ly, from granfer to grandson; yas, it do. My granfer were a tarrable thirsty feller."

"Ah," said Hugo, "now we know, Tom, why you generally try to end up near the inn at Kingscross."

Presently pipes were lit, and tobacco-smoke mingled with the reek of the small camp-fire which Tom Henbest had lighted. Mowland threw into the flames a few fir-cones; an agreeable, resinous odour filled the air.

"How good it is to be alive!" exclaimed Burgess.

Upon the faces of the four men lay an expression of elemental content and repose. Familiar to Hugo was that look. He had seen it a thousand times upon the faces of trappers in the Far West lying round the camp-fire, upon Indians drifting down the rivers with their canoes full of pelts, upon his Tartar guides in Manchuria, upon the blacks of Somaliland. It is an expression for which

you may search in vain through roaring thoroughfares.

"Depends where you are," said Hugo lazily. "It's not good to be alive in a prison."

Burgess nodded, and quoted some lines from the "Ballad of Reading Gaol":

"With bars they blur the gracious moon
And blind the goodly sun ;
And they do well to hide their hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of man
Ever should look upon."

His warm, soft voice thrilled and broke. For the first time Hugo understood the power of the orator to move an audience, and the infinitely greater power of the man of magnetism to transport a listener whithersoever he pleased.

"Who wrote that?" said Hugo.

Burgess mentioned the most unhappy of men known to our generation. A long silence succeeded. Here, in these sylvan spaces, far from the fret and fever of modern life, the mere mention of that name was like a discord, the blare of a motor-horn when nightingales are singing. And yet the man was dead—and the poet lived; the good had survived, the evil lay in the corruption of the grave. Hugo looked at Burgess—a Galahad, unless all signs were at fault. How fortunate he had been in finding such a friend at the moment when most needed! The young fellow's temperament,

enthusiasm, freshness, and capacity for enjoyment had quickened in the older man similar emotions long denied expression. But what a gulf lay between them!

By a curious coincidence Nature presented an example, brutally emphasizing the difference between, let us say, a Galahad and a Launcelot. Not a score of yards away two splendid trees, a beech and an oak, stood together upon the edge of the coppice. The oak still retained a few leaves; the beech was stripped bare. Then Hugo perceived that it was dead—struck by lightning.

"We must get on," he said.

"One more pipe," pleaded Burgess. "This is so glorious. I feel perfectly fit again. Of course, you've had this sort of thing all your life; you can't enjoy it as I do."

"I think I can."

"That pheasant-run rather bored you, I dare say."

"As a matter of fact, I enjoyed it more than many a big day when I've shot hundreds of pheasants."

"Hundreds of pheasants? I say, you must know some swells."

Hugo bit his lip. He had given himself away more than once, fortunately to a young fellow who was entirely occupied with himself and one other. Nevertheless, Burgess had gleaned some rather surprising bits of information. He knew that Hugo had been educated

at Eton, and that he had travelled much in wild parts of the world. He was able to deduce from these facts that Hugo must have possessed ample means; for, obviously, he had never entered a profession or worked for a living.

"I know some swells."

"Charters, you *are* a swell. I saw that from the first. You looked a swell even when you began to grow a beard. You're not a wicked nobleman in disguise, are you?"

"Certainly not."

A certain peremptoriness of tone arrested other questions. Burgess harked back.

"Glorious as this is as a change, it would bore me if I lived here."

Hugo looked at him reflectively. Burgess continued:

"I'm awfully fond of the Forest of Ys; but I love Piccadilly, don't you?"

"Um! No."

"The finest thoroughfare in the world, bar none."

Hugo glanced at Henbest and Mowland, flat on their backs and fast asleep.

"Do you ever walk down Piccadilly late at night, Burgess?"

"Oh! Yes—sometimes."

He flushed, hesitated, and then said quickly:

"You see, that's the side I don't know."

"Lucky fellow! Life seems easy to you, because you have made no bad slips."

"Must one make bad slips?"

Hugo shrugged his shoulders.

"There are certain slips for which one pays rather too dearly. At your age I liked thoroughfares, particularly the roaring ones. Now, somehow, I seem to see not the well-dressed men, swaggering along with their chests out and their chins up, but the others—the poor devils who have been run over. And such a little thing may upset one, a strip of orange-peel, eh? And then—bif!—a bus rolls over you! Come on." He rose up and stretched his limbs. "I wonder whether there is another woodcock in those alders?"

Burgess got up too, staring at Hugo with a new interest in his eyes. Certainly Hugo had his chest out and his chin up. Burgess touched his arm with a gesture of sympathy impossible to resent or ignore.

"I say," he whispered, "you've not been run over, have you?"

"Yes," said Hugo curtly.

CHAPTER X

DECEMBER brought sharp frosts. Day after day glided by, wiping out of Hugo's mind the stains of the past, filling it with the joys and interests of the present. He worked in Sarah Owbridge's garden, he read many books, he played golf and shot in the Forest of Ys. The Vennables, father and daughter, left him alone, but he heard of them continually from Burgess. At night, over the fire, Burgess would talk of Joy until Hugo began to believe that he knew her intimately. He became more and more sensible that Burgess was what he might have been. Upon this account the young fellow's artless prattle had a personal significance and interest.

From the beginning it was made plain that the nymph eluded her pursuer. She seemed to have the instinct of all shy, wild things in the forest. She fled before the licensee.

"One fine day," said Hugo, "you'll find her sitting and take a pot-shot at her."

"I miss pot-shots, as you know," Burgess replied dismally.

"Cheer up! You'll bag her. And then,

I suppose, she'll be set up in a glass case in St. John's Wood."

There had been talk of St. John's Wood. Burgess knew of a tiny house in Grove End Road, not too far from the Tube. There they would be as happy as larks.

"A lark in London looks a forlorn bird," said Hugo.

"Would a fellow be justified in marrying on eight hundred a year?"

"That depends on the fellow. The right sort can marry and be happy on much less; the wrong sort, with a million a year, had better remain single."

"I don't believe she'll leave her father. Selfish old man!"

Burgess had begun to harp of late upon George Vennable's selfishness. Joy was his slave, his willing slave.

"That makes a difference," said Hugo judicially. "She likes her life. In a sense that father of hers has made a man of her. She has a man's delight in overcoming obstacles. I should like to see her face to face with a big emergency. What a wife she would make for a pioneer! I've met girls like her in the Australian Bush."

"What a lot of places you've visited!"

"Yes."

Burgess spoke of this to Joy.

"It's as I told you," he said next day.

"Charters must have had money; and perhaps

he's lost it. He hinted, you remember, at a diminished income. And he won't accept your hospitality because he can't return it."

"You believe that, Esmé?"

"Why not?"

"He took out a licence, he bought a valuable setter from Uncle Giles's keeper, and you tell me that he never looks long for a two-shilling golf-ball. Returning our hospitality would not be a very expensive business."

"If he accepted your invitations he would have to accept others. He's been run over."

"Perhaps he deserved it."

"I don't believe that."

"Do you know the difference between a goose and a swan?"

"I do when I look at you."

"I'm neither goose nor swan."

"Charters says you would make a splendid wife for a pioneer."

"Oh, really."

"I'm going to be a pioneer, Joy."

"What else does Mr. Charters say about me?"

"He would like to see you face to face with a big emergency."

"I'd like to see him face to face with a job of work."

"Go down to Sarah's, and look at the garden."

"It exasperates me to see a man as strong as your Mr. Charters wasting his life digging in

other people's gardens. Why doesn't he dig in his own?"

"Of course, I should like to ask him that. It all comes back to what I said at first. He's been run over, and you ought to be very sorry for him."

"He excites my curiosity, nothing else. It's odd you know so little about him."

"His beard is quite presentable now."

"I hate men with beards," said Miss Joy.

Meantime, if Burgess knew little concerning Charteris, Charteris knew nearly all there was to know of Burgess.

Passing judgment on the boy, for as boy Hugo regarded him, the loss and gain from lack of a public-school education were plainly visible. He had been well named Esmé, a name common to either sex, for in him were fused the masculine and the feminine. He had a woman's sensibility, something of a woman's vanity (which is so different, although not greater, than that of a man), and much of a woman's capacity for engrossing herself in her own occupations. Doubtless at Eton or Harrow this feminine bloom would have been rubbed away.

Hugo did not like him the less because he was absorbed in himself, his profession, and his love-affair. Moreover, there was dramatic interest in the conflict between the inadjustable claims of love and business. Love, for the moment, monopolised the young fellow's atten-

tion. And it was first love, the genuine passion, which stirs the pulses of the most hardened beholder.

Sarah Owbridge had a word to say about this. Hugo and she were now great friends—gossips, perhaps, expresses the relation better.

"It's a case," said the widow, "but whether or no Miss Joy cares tuppence about 'im is what I lay awake nights and ask myself. A handsomer couple I've never seen."

"Would Miss Vennable leave her father?"

"I don't know as she would. Maybe not. I'd like to see 'er takin' up with one o' the landed gentry. She'd make a rare duchess, she would—manage a dukedom, and the duke into the bargain."

"You're a masterful woman, Mrs. Owbridge."

"Ah! I never knowed it till I was two-and-thirty."

"Really?"

"Not till six years after I married pore Owbridge. He was one o' them tall, big, talk-you-down fellers. Sang bass in the choir, he did. Weighed nigh on to fifteen stun, too! Well, he'd habits I didn't like; but I'd dassn't say a word, him bein' such a mountain of a man, an' me little bigger than a mouse in them days. One of 'is tricks was to pull off his muddy boots and leave 'em in my nice clean kitchen! That used to make me bile! He done it one night just after I'd spent the afternoon a-scrubbin' the floor. When he come in

to tea, there they was a-lyin near the dresser. 'Ullo,' he says presently, 'ain't you goin' to take them boots away?' 'No,' I says, 'I ain't.' 'Then they'll lie there till the Day o' Judgment,' says Owbridge. We were sittin' at tea, me one side o' the table, and Owbridge and our first ehild, Ellen, a little gell of five, on t'other. Owbridge had been spiled tarrible by his mother. 'No, they won't,' I says, 'not if you was twiece the man that you is! I want you to learn that I ain't your mother.' And with that I so far forgot myself as to lean aecross the table and slap his face. He'd a look on it that just drove me wild. I hastened to say I meant it for the ehild, but Owbridge was more frightened than hurt. I never had no trouble with the pore feller after that."

"Hauled down his flag, eh?"

"Not altogether; but he let me fly mine inside the house, and that's as it should be. But nex' Sunday I did notice that seemingly his voice did not drown the rest of the choir quite so much as usual."

"I'm sure he sang small for ever after."

"Owbridge couldn't ha' done that if he'd tried ever so. You like your joke, Mr. Charters. Well, well, it's laughin', not weepin' and gnashin' o' teeth, that turns a hard life into an easy one. Miss Joy knows that. Allus a pleasant smile for saints and sinners alike."

"For sinners? Any sinners in Hershaw Parva?"

"Sinners? Bless me! And that there drunken vagabond, Tom Henbest, your own beater. Why, the parish is full of sinners, all sorts an' sizes! But Miss Joy has a soft spot in her 'cart for big and little."

"No exceptions?"

His clear grey eyes looked straight into hers. He spoke in a very quiet voice, which almost seemed to indicate indifference, but his left hand crumbled nervously a piece of bread. He had just finished his dinner; Burgess was with the Vennables; Mrs. Owbridge had come in to clear away.

"Well as to that——" She paused, and in a graver tone continued: "What she was to that silly sheep Bella Rockley in her trouble nobody knows but Bella 'erself, and she's at Bournemouth in the good respectable place Miss Joy found for 'er; but the man as caused the trouble—oh, my!"

"She tackled the man, did she?"

Sarah Owbridge smiled grimly.

"Yes, she tackled him. He was a married man—ratepayer, too. Bella went there to 'elp nurse his sick wife. We sha'n't never know what Miss Joy said to him, but he cleared out o' Hernshaw Magna, bag and baggage. Got drunk the night before he left, and said he couldn't face the lightnin' in 'er eye. Them was his words exact—'*Couldn't face the lightnin' in 'er eye.*'"

Mrs. Owbridge removed the cheese and

swept up the crumbs. Hugo pulled his pipe from his pocket.

"Then there was the case of Ebenezer Snart, wife-beater," continued the widow. She paused, slightly puzzled by the expression on Hugo's face.

"Let us hear about Ebenezer Snart. Heavens! what a name!"

"It matched the man—half hypocrite, half bully. One o' them as don't care what their own flesh an' blood thinks of them, so long as they stand well with the rest o' the world. To listen to him, Sundays, beseechin' the Lord to have mercy upon him for a miserable sinner, you'd ha' thought that he was wastin' precious breath. Not one of us knew that he beat 'is wife and children crool! Miss Joy found it out."

"How?"

"She have a wonnerful nose for huntin' out foxes. Anyways, she walks down to the ale-house, where Ebenezer was drinking his glass on Saturday night with some o' the respectablest men in the parish—men like Mr. Pragson, him as hands the plate in church. Miss Joy marches straight into the parlour. 'Ebenezer Snart,' she says, 'do you want to see the inside of Westchester Gaol?' 'No, miss,' he answers, quite polite, 'I do not.' 'Then,' says she, in her easy, pleasant way, 'you'd better let me break *this*.' And if she didn't pull out from be'ind her back a nasty,

venomous-lookin' rattan cane, one o' them knotty ones. If it 'ud becn a p'isonous serpent, Ebenezer Snart couldn't ha' looked more scairt. He went the colour o' skilly. Miss Joy broke it across her knee. 'Now,' she says, 'don't you never buy another, and don't you never forget that I'm going to keep this, because I may want to show it to a magistrate some day. Good-evening.' It was quite wonnerful to see how Mrs. Snart and the children perked up after that."

"A very remarkable young lady," said Hugo, lighting his pipe.

Mrs. Owbridge bustled away, leaving him to his thoughts. He was telling himself, for the twentieth time, that it would be pleasant to have such a girl—no, such a *woman*—as Joy for a friend. A line of Barrie's came into his mind: "Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves." He smoked on, staring into the fire, which burned low, forgot to replenish it, forgot to refill his pipe, which went out. The shadows gathered upon his face, for, curiously enough, we are constrained, willy-nilly, to analyze misery, whereas we accept happiness without comment or speculation. Hugo was reflecting that six months pass quickly when one's lines lie in pleasant places and among simple, pleasant people. Presently he sat up with a start, realizing that the fire was nearly out, that his feet and hands were cold. With bellows and

a couple of logs he soon created a cheerful blaze. Then he took from his pocket a letter, and read it for the second time. It had arrived that morning, forwarded by the ever-faithful Pixton.

"DEAREST HUGO" (it began),

"I must send you a line, although I dare say it won't reach you. I saw in the papers that you had gone abroad; I knew when we parted that you would hide yourself in the wilds. I miss you horribly, and am literally counting the days till we meet again. John is in India. He has provided very generously for Poppet. I thought I might be tempted to touch some of her money, so I did the cleverest thing. I put all of it into a dream of a cabinet—a genuine Chippendale with panels painted by Angelica Kauffman—and *signed!* Simply adorable! It looks rather absurd in the nursery, but I feel as if I could say my prayers before it. Poppet said she would sooner have a Japanese cat. I told her that cats died, but that a nice bit of furniture was a joy for ever. Sometimes she is rather like John. She cares for nothing but animals and persons. She's always asking after you.

"Mother inflicted a visitation upon me. She hopes that John and I will come together again (her words). She was so relieved when I told her on my honour that I hadn't the ghost of an idea where you were. At first I said Jericho,

and she took me quite seriously; asked why you had gone to Jericho, and I replied, 'To bathe in the Jordan.' *She couldn't see the joke.* Considering what a sense of humour I have, it is amazing that poor mother should be so dense, isn't it?"

"I nipped over to Paris the other day to try to get an idea of what will be worn in five months' time. If we are married in April we might have our honeymoon at Monte.

"Poppet joins me in sending heaps of love and kisses.

"Your own
"ANGEL."

His own Angel! He dropped the letter into the heart of the fire, and watched it shrivel up. Once he had kept every scrap of her handwriting and some of her telegrams. They lay in a despatch-box at his flat, with a glove she had worn at a ball years ago, and a tiny lace handkerchief which he had stolen. Now, shutting his eyes, he could see plainly certain dresses, and her jewels, in particular, absolutely sparkled in his memory, but her face eluded him. He tried to recall her as she first swam into his vision at Ascot, and failed. Cynthia's kindly eyes and smile shone out of the fire; Edward, too, and many others long forgotten; but she, who signed herself his Angel, remained invisible.

Had she ceased to be a woman? Why did

he perceive so clearly that diamond and opal necklaee which she had bought with poor young Tressilian's loot? Tressilian! The boy came at his call, a gallant figure. He, too, had given all and received nothing—except a Boer bullet. They said he had deliberately exposed himself again and again. A life thrown away for the sake of a woman who liked things better than persons, who, really and truly, said her prayers to a cabinet with panels painted by Angelica Kauffman!

Burgess entered the sitting-room a few minutes later. At once Hugo divined that something had happened. He thought for the moment that the young fellow must have encountered a rebuff from Joy. His face was pale, and his eyes, usually sparkling with animation, had a brooding, sombre expression. He crossed to the fire, leaned his elbow upon the mantelpiece, and said, in a very quiet voice:

“Diphtheria has broken out in Hernshaw Parva.”

“Where?”

“At Mowland's. Joy is distracted. A month ago she implored Sir Giles to put things right, and all that, but he refused. Now it's likely to go through the village.”

“Mowland hasn't got it?”

“No, that jolly little kid with the mop of curly, yellow hair. And another seems to be sickening. By Jove! it's an odd thing——”

"What's odd?"

"You were saying only the other day that you would like to see Joy Vennable face to face with a big emergency. Well—you will."

"God forbid!" said Hugo, almost to himself.

CHAPTER XI

NEXT day, just after breakfast, Mrs. Owbridge ushered Joy into the room where Hugo was sitting. He rose, rather stiffly, supposing that she had come to see Burgess, offering to find him.

"No, no," she said hurriedly, exhibiting a slight confusion. "I know that he's writing upstairs. Don't disturb him. In fact, I—I want to speak to you."

In silence he offered her a chair, looking at her troubled face, which seemed to have lost its Clytie-like expression of happiness and serenity, and to have gained instead an interest almost greater, because so poignant. Characteristically, she wasted no words.

"Mr. Burgess has told you about the diphtheria?"

"Yes."

"I've just seen Frank Tisdale, the doctor. He is usually too cheerful and optimistic; but to-day"—she twisted her fingers nervously—"well, I cornered him—I *made* him speak the truth."

As she paused for an instant Hugo said carelessly :

"That's a way you have, isn't it?"

Her tone was easier, and a faint smile showed as she nodded. Then she seemed to pull herself together to deliver the doctor's fiat.

"He says it's epidemic, and very, very virulent."

Her blue eyes courted attention with a peculiar appealing interrogation. She laid a slight stress upon the second "very."

"I'm so sorry," said Hugo gravely.

"Children and young men and women who are not very robust will be most liable to get it."

"Undoubtedly."

That she was driving at something, he divined. Her hesitation, so alien to her, the trouble which obscured her clear eyes, her fidgeting fingers, indicated extreme mental distress. Hugo was asking himself if she was afraid, when she startled him by putting into words the actual question :

"You are not afraid?" Without waiting for his answer, she went on : "And nor am I. We are not entitled to take any credit for that, are we?"

She spoke almost defiantly.

"Certainly not."

"That sort of thing is constitutional. Mr. Burgess told me that you had had some experience of Asiatic cholera."

"I have been in cholera camps."

"Is it true that people die of sheer fear?"

"I have heard of such cases. Fear makes a man susceptible to cholera, or, for the matter of that, to any contagious disease. At Panama, when men fell down in the streets with 'Yellow Jack,' the funkens were the first to be attacked, and the first to die. Some didn't have the courage to fight for their lives, poor devils!"

Joy looked at him steadily. Her air of constraint and uneasiness had vanished.

"You saw that? Couldn't you get away—escape?"

Hugo laughed.

"Every able-bodied man was wanted. There were hardly enough of us to bury the dead."

"How awful!"

"Yes. I mentioned that on purpose. It makes it easier to face this. Here you have everything, and there——"

He spoke cheerily, emphatically. At his words, and all they conveyed, she lost her nervousness. With a different manner, she said briskly:

"I'm ashamed of myself for feeling so blue. Of course, you're wondering what I've come for?" She examined his face, which had reassumed its impassive expression. "I suppose you know that you have a great influence over my cousin?"

"I?" His tone betrayed astonishment.

"Yes, you. I dare say you don't know it;

and that, perhaps, makes it the stronger. Of course, he hasn't told you how very delicate he is?"

"He doesn't look delicate."

"But he is. That is part of his charm. When he was a boy we were devoted to him, because we thought that he would be with us for only a short time. He was a wonderful boy."

A dreamy expression suffused her fine eyes, the colour of a rain-washed sky.

"He is a wonderful young man," said Charteris slowly.

"I don't think of him as a young man."

Charteris nodded. He was amazed, but his face betrayed neither surprise nor interrogation. Joy went on:

"To me he is still a boy, although he is three years older than I am. I can't tell you what he is to me."

"You needn't. I can guess."

She was too occupied with her own thoughts to notice the odd inflection in his voice; and her simplicity, the ingenious directness of her methods, the instinct in her to "go straight," were likely to confuse and puzzle a man of the world who had had no dealings whatever with girls of that kind. He supposed that she had just made an avowal of love for Burgess, to whom, possibly, she might be secretly engaged. In an intense voice she continued, not looking at Hugo, but staring, as it were, into the yesterdays, of which he could know nothing:

"I never met a boy like him, so modest, so affectionate, and—don't laugh at me—so spiritually minded."

"That is very rare in boys," Hugo murmured.

"It oughtn't to be!" she said vehemently. "It's a disgrace to our system of education that it is so. But Esmé was brought up at home. Do you consider him effeminate?"

"No, not effeminate, but——"

"Feminine." She snatched the word from his lips. "He is dependent upon the sympathy and affection of others; he is miserable without it; not strong enough," she gazed steadily at Hugo, "to stand quite alone, as, as you do, for instance." She paused for a moment, and, in a more restrained tone and manner, made good her point. "He has talked of you to me; he has told me of your adventures in wild places, of the escapes you have had. All that appealed to him enormously, because he knows in his heart, poor boy! that he would have died over and over again in places where you lived."

"I am strong, and so are you."

"I am glad you think that. Yes, I am strong," the strange freckles in her blue eyes began to sparkle again, "and I'm not afraid of things or people. It's nothing to be proud of; one is born that way, isn't one? But we, you and I, may be glad, very glad and thankful, that we are strong."

For the first time she threw back her head

and laughed, not loudly, but with unabashed satisfaction. So sane and convincing was her enjoyment of health and strength that Hugo smiled, nodding his head, as if confirming an unspoken comradeship.

"You want me to do something?"

"Yes. Persuade Esmé to leave Hernshaw at once."

"And you think I shall succeed where you have failed? You have failed, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"I'll do my best, Miss Vennable. You appoint me your Plenipotentiary-Extraordinary?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I want a free hand."

"But, of course——"

"I must use every argument that occurs to me."

"Naturally. Why do you look at me so oddly?"

He hesitated; but his eyes remained on hers.

"You see," he said, in a very quiet voice, "the argument which I rely upon, the argument which you, perhaps, disdain to use, is your affection for him."

"Certainly. Use that for all it's worth. It's his affection for me which keeps him here. Yes, yes; pile on the agony!" She laughed gaily. "I couldn't do that. Besides, I dislike sentiment. But really," in an instant her voice changed and melted into an adorable

whisper, "I should go wild with misery if anything happened."

"Right!" said Hugo curtly.

She rose, holding out her hand, which he took. At the contact he was sensible of an odd thrill, half pain, half pleasure.

"I am on my way to see my uncle, to ask for money. This disease must be fought with money."

"Sir Giles is not a rich man."

"He could sell a picture." She sighed. "I hate badgering him, but I must. No one else will do it——"

"Or can successfully."

"Well, I shall try to coax it out of him, or squeeze it out of him, or beat it out of him. Do you think I might dun my cousin's wife, Mrs. Giles Mottisfont?"

"Mrs. Giles Mottisfont?"

"She was an heiress, Mollie Savernake."

"Mollie Savernake?"

The name struck hard against his memory. He remembered Mollie Savernake perfectly, could see her somewhat shrewd eye, could hear her slightly derisive laughter. And it was certain that Mollie Savernake would remember Hugo Charteris.

"Is Mrs. Giles Mottisfont down here?"

"Oh dear, no. She hardly ever comes. She was at the Park for the big shoot, and went away the next day. She's a very smart lady. Perhaps you know her?"

Her bright eyes pierced him. Once again an irresistible impulse seized him to speak out. Instead, he said dully :

"I seem to recall the name."

"She's a good sort, but frightfully extravagant. Still, at a pinch—— Mr. Tisdale says we shall want a lot of money."

"About how much?"

She considered.

"A hundred pounds at the very least."

"You want a hundred pounds at once?"

"Never wanted it so badly before."

"Let me give it to you."

"You?"

He found himself flushing scarlet, but fortunately his back was to the lattice window, and the light was atrocious. He realized instantly that he had behaved like a child. For the moment he had forgotten everything, except the fact that he was a rich man, and that a charming girl wanted a hundred pounds for a worthy object.

"I have it, lying idle. I owe Hernshaw something. I should like to help. I——"

He broke off, conscious that she was regarding him with a certain aloofness.

The Mottisfont spoke very courteously, but coldly :

"You are most generous, most kind, but this money must come from *us*. Good-bye."

She slipped from the room; then, as the door was closing, it opened again, and her

head appeared. The coldness had gone out of her eyes and mouth.

"It was delightful of you to offer to help, but we are rather proud down here. All the same—thank you."

He was left with a vision of white teeth, a radiant smile, and blue eyes, with brown elves dancing in their lucid depths.

A few minutes later he went upstairs to the room where Esmé Burgess worked. The young man sat at a table, in front of a typewriting machine, half-way between a small fire and a small window looking out upon the Forest. On another table lay piles of script and foolscap, and a number of pamphlets dealing with rural depopulation, Free Trade, and similar subjects. A rough deal bookcase held some works on political economy in French, English, and German. All bore signs of use and abuse. Notes in pencil defaced the fine, broad margins of the French books; slips of paper stuck out of the closely-printed German volumes. Check by jowl with these were some nice editions of the English poets.

Beside the inkpot stood a small glass holding a few primroses. Primroses may be found in the Forest of Ys in January, but they have to be sought diligently. Hugo knew that Burgess and Joy Vennable had made a long expedition to find them, and that the spoil had been

divided. Did Joy's primroses shine out amongst the litter of a busy woman's writing-table, or were they already pressed and put away, enshrined in some favourite book? Perhaps—the thought quickened his pulses—they lay upon her white breast.

Near the window, against the wall, was a sofa, bearing marks of muddy boots. Hugo could only guess that it was used after the long tramps in the Forest, after golf, after a hard morning's work. No one, not even Sarah Owbridge, had ever caught the young fellow upon it.

"Hullo, Charters!"

"Hullo! Sorry to disturb you."

There had been an appreciable interval between Hugo's knock on the door and Burgess's "Come in."

"Not at all. Glad to see you. Sit down."

Hugo sat down on the sofa. He remembered that he had not heard the click of the typewriter as he came upstairs.

"You look rather fagged," he said abruptly.

To his surprise, Burgess at once exhibited a little temper.

"You didn't march upstairs to tell me that, did you?" he said irritably. "Why shouldn't I be fagged? A man ought to look fagged when he's trying to solve problems. This bovine expression, this look of contentment which seems to be the inalienable possession of the Jallands and the Pundles and the

Mottisfont, always exasperates me. I never see a fat, placid face that I don't want to hit it."

"Take a whack at mine," said Hugo.

Burgess laughed, recovering instantly his good temper and his good manners.

"Your face is not placid, Charters, far from it. You can look like a graven image when you please, and I can't, worse luck! but inside you feel as I do. Last night, when I told you about this diphtheria, a sort of glowering savage light shone in your eyes which might have twisted Sir Giles's heart into something like terror if he had seen it."

"I doubt it."

"I've been simmering the whole morning. Last night I couldn't sleep a wink. That jolly little dear with her curly poll. And if these infernal sties had been pulled down——"

He began to talk excitedly, using gestures, moving his lips. Hugo happened to put his hand upon a cushion. It was warm. Then he knew why Burgess had not invited him to come in at once. He had been lying upon the sofa thinking of the pestilence. Suddenly he spluttered out:

"Do you know how many pheasants they got at their big shoot?"

"No."

"Seven hundred! And not a farthing to spare for those sties. It is perfectly damnable. A fat to breed anarchists."

"Keep cool!"

"And Sir Giles reads prayers every morning. You ought to hear him. And grace before meat! 'Lord, give us thankful hearts!' And, of course, the Lord has sent this plague. Sir Giles will shift all responsibility to Him. He'll nod his head and say to everybody: 'Yes, yes, to be sure, those sties ought to have come down. I have said so again and again; but in these bad times we landlords are powerless. We can't do the right thing.'"

He imitated his pompous, fussy kinsman to the life.

"It's not easy to do the right thing," said Hugo. "There's something you ought to do, Burgess."

"Eh?"

"The sooner you strike camp the better."

"Leave Hernshaw?"

"To-day, if possible."

"Do you think I am afraid of this beastly disease?"

Fear of it was inscribed in indelible ink upon his excited face, quavered in his voice, made his thin, finely modelled hands shake with apprehension, but his voice rang out clearly. Hugo, feeling no fear, secure in the conviction of a constitution that had escaped unscathed from "Yellow Jack" and cholera, was none the less sensible of a curious sympathy and admiration for the speaker.

"If you are not afraid," he said curtly, "you

ought to be. You came here in search of health."

"And I've got it, the Lord be praised!"

"Are you positive about that?"

"I'm twice the man I was six weeks ago."

Hugo got up, crossed to him, and took his hand, holding it lightly by the wrist. Burgess, divining his object, wriggled uneasily.

"Pulse quick and jerky," said Hugo, in his quiet, indifferent tone. "Loss of sleep last night, eh? No appetite at breakfast, I noticed. Couldn't look your egg in the face. Now, take my tip. Pack up."

"Are *you* going to bolt, Charters?"

"No, not yet."

"Nor am I. Better have a cigarette; keeps off germs."

Hugo accepted the cigarette, reflecting that an offer of one includes the invitation to smoke it in the company of the donor. While he lit it, he wondered how he would submit his case.

"Your health is vital to you, but if you refuse to consider yourself, perhaps you will pay attention to someone else."

"To whom?"

"To whom have you been paying attention?"

"Joy has been here?"

His quickness of perception did not surprise Hugo.

Burgess continued :

"And she asked you to ask me to bolt?"

"Well—yes."

Burgess laughed lightly, as if Hugo were the boy and he the man.

"That's rather funny."

"Funny?"

"She did her best to persuade me last night. Does she think that you will succeed where she failed? And you," he couldn't keep the disdain out of his voice, "do you think that I would do something for you which I refused to do for her?"

"That depends."

"On what, please?"

"On the point of view. I'm going to change your point of view. Miss Vennable urged you to leave Hernshaw on your own account: I urge you to leave it on hers."

Burgess stared.

"On hers? What do you mean?"

"It's not easy to say what I mean, but I shall try."

He looked steadily at Burgess, mentally taking stock of him, appraising his value as the husband, the companion, the protector of Joy. Joy would not be easy to satisfy. And if she had fallen in love with a boy, if she delighted to think of him as a boy, that would not prevent her from expecting him to grow to the full stature of a man.

"Miss Vennable will want all her strength for this fight. It's going to be a fight, Burgess.

And she is so strong, so physically fit, that her risk is hardly worth considering."

"She'd take it, whatever we thought."

"Exactly. As her father's daughter she has no choice. But you, if you insist on staying here, will imperil seriously her peace of mind, rob her as well as yourself of sleep."

"How do you know that?"

"She admitted as much."

"What did she say?"

Hugo hesitated; then, with a slow impressiveness, he answered:

"She said that she would go wild with misery if anything happened to you."

Burgess's eyes were shining, his cheeks flushed, as he exclaimed:

"God bless her! She cares."

"You didn't know that she cared?"

Burgess passed his hand across his forehead.

"I was never quite sure," he replied. "She is always so absolutely at her ease with me, always the—the sister, you know. Go wild, would she? The darling! Charters, somehow I can show to you what I have tried to hide from myself. I have never been sure, never! And, of course, I couldn't—I mean I wouldn't—speak till my position was more assured. I've my fellowship and a small income. But if they're going to put me into the House, or if I should be offered the assistant-editorship of our review, which I have been promised, why, then——"

"You would ask her to be your wife?"

"In a jiffy, particularly now that—— I say, would it be fair to make a bargain with her? Suppose I told her that I'd run away if she'll let me come back within six months to marry her, eh?"

"The word 'bargain' is so detestable. In your place I should leave Hershaw, not necessarily the Forest. You can shoot and write twelve miles away. I should go at once, without conditions."

"Some fellow has said, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder—of someone else!' I hate the idea of leaving her; still—— And it's perfectly true that if this confounded disease attacked me I should probably lose her altogether, but——" His irresolution, his inexperience, and the pride which prevented him from asking another man outright to make up his mind for him, brought a smile to Hugo's lips.

"What would you do, Charters?"

"Obey her."

"You say you mean to stay on here?"

He spoke tentatively.

"Yes."

"To help Joy?"

"I don't suppose I shall see much of Miss Vennable, but I mean to help if I'm wanted."

"What a good chap you are!"

"If one is perfectly fit, fighting an epidemic is rather exciting."

Burgess looked enviously at the square shoulders and deep chest.

"I'd give anything for your physique," he said enviously.

"Roosevelt and Balfour, not to mention Pitt and Gladstone, were not robust as young men."

"I know—I know. Well," he drew a deep breath, "I shall take your advice, on one condition: that you do stay here till the worst is over. The job's a beastly one, but if it's to your liking, so much the better. At any rate, you'll keep an eye on Joy, and you'll swear to let me know at once if she overworks herself?"

"She will, but it won't hurt her."

He spoke quite unconsciously, with a curious and impressive conviction. From the first Joy had appeared to him as the impersonation of youth and strength and health, and therefore immune. The best type of trained nurse invariably produces this impression; and it is likely that they are themselves sensible of their power not only to attack but also to defend themselves against the counter-attack of any disease, however contagious.

"You've been awfully kind and sympathetic, Charters." He held out his hand. His soft, brown eyes were suffused with gratitude. He continued with restraint, still holding Hugo's hand: "Perhaps you've been through something of this sort yourself?"

"Perhaps."

Hugo withdrew his hand.

Burgess stared at him, not offensively, but as if with a clearer vision. Viewed in this new light, Hugo presented a solid appearance.

'You're much older than I, Charters?'

"Years and years and years, and more than years."

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because," his voice was very pleasant, "I can read you so easily. For an instant you became jealous of me. You feared that I might snatch your Joy if I were left alone with her."

"Oh, I say——"

"To put your mind at ease, let me tell you this, I know that I can rely upon your discretion, I'm engaged to be married. Within a few months I shall be married. Now, go your way with a light heart. And, look here, if I catch anyone poaching on your preserves, I'll let you know."

"Then I'm off."

His voice rang out gaily. He was glad to be off, glad to escape the certainty of seeing sickness and death. The artistic temperament, adoring what is beautiful, loathes with equal intensity what is ugly; and the relief in the young fellow's tone became at once the measure of his courage, because he had confronted Fear bravely, knowing his own weakness, but subduing it. Hugo had seen strong

men slink from a cholera-infested camp, leaving their comrades to die; many had remained: some because fear and they were strangers, others because they were strong enough to wrestle with the devil that possessed them and cast him out; and these last had been the bravest men he had ever known.

Next day, early in the morning, Esmé Burgess drove away from Hernshaw Parva; but before he left he knew that one of the Mowland children was dead, and that the fever had spread to the adjoining cottages.

CHAPTER XII

THE Misses Mottisfont received the news of the diphtheria from the lips of Esther Purkess, the pretty parlourmaid. Elias Purkess, her father, a lineal descendant of the Purkess who helped to remove the body of the king when he was shot in the woods below Kingscross, lived in a cottage near the Mowlands. This man serves as an excellent example of the effect of climate and environment upon a family. The historical Purkess had been a charcoal-burner. After nearly a thousand years, his descendants remained charcoal-burners, chimney-sweeps, cutters of fern, and poachers. Tenaciously they had clung to their habitat, never leaving it, never seeking to better their position in life, content to increase and multiply in the very humble station first assigned to them. Esther's father, for instance, was an earth-stopper in the hunting season, and, as such, not without a certain local standing; also he could drink more ale than any other man in Hernshaw Parva without getting drunk; he played an astonishing game of quoits, and he had thirteen children.

Esther, a true Forester (inasmuch as the prospect of illness or death excited her profoundly), suggested to Miss Priscilla the propriety of returning home "to help mother," it being absolutely certain that the diphtheria would levy heavy toll upon the Purkess family. Miss Priscilla said "Rubbish!" in a voice not to be gainsaid, and instructed Esther to keep away from her people, and, indeed, to confine her walks to the kitchen-garden. Then, as soon as the maid had whisked rather indignantly out of the room, she said calmly to Miss Lavinia:

"Giles was observing only the other day that those sties in Hernshaw Parva ought to be pulled down."

"I have heard him use your words, sister."

"This is the visitation of God."

"Yes, sister; His hand is heavy upon us."

They looked at each other, nodding their heads. The Mottisfontes prided themselves, and justly, upon their good looks, but in later life they assumed something of the appearance of sheep—eyes set too far apart, upper lips too long—and the straight line of forehead and nose did nothing to dissipate this appearance.

Having been brought up in those good old days when backboards in the schoolroom were deemed of much more importance than windows open at the top, they sat rigidly upright in chairs covered with tapestry worked by themselves. Upon the seat of each chair

was the Mottisfont coat with its many quarterings, each representing fat acres brought to the family by well-dowered heiresses, and upon the back was the Mottisfont crest—a bubbling fountain, not unlike an artesian well in full flow, and beneath the motto: *Tenax et probus*.

It was Tuesday, usually a busy day with the aunts, because of the foreign mails, but without exchanging a word each composed herself into an attitude suggestive of Sabbath calm and meditation.

"I shall look out some old linen," observed Miss Priscilla presently; and Miss Lavinia nodded gravely, saying: "I will help you, my dear."

Thus they sat for nearly half an hour, quite silent. The Mottisfont family always accepted the heavier blows of Providence in this resigned and chastened spirit, however much they might murmur and rebel against such smaller inflictions as colds in the head and the loss of domestic servants.

"This will cost poor Giles a pretty penny."

"We must do our part."

"We could withdraw, for this year, our subscriptions to the County Hospital. Some people might call that robbing Peter to pay Paul, but, in my opinion, such action is quite justifiable if Paul happens to be your own brother and Peter a mere acquaintance."

"I quite agree," said Miss Lavinia. Then

she added: "We have no thought of leaving the Forest?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Priscilla, not meeting her sister's eye. Each knew that the other was terrified. In addition to Esther, they employed three young maids, whose parents happened to live in Hernshaw Parva.

Already they could smell the detestable fumes of sulphur overpowering the delicate perfume of lavender and potpourri which subtly pervaded every nook and cranny of the Lodge; already they could see the small cloud swelling to enormous proportions, obscuring their placid skies; already they were counting the new graves in the pretty cemetery which held snugly so many Mottisfont. And such thoughts were intensely disagreeable to them. The mind of each old lady harboured an unformulated protest against the unreason of asking any Mottisfont to leave Hernshaw, even if heaven were the appointed destination. Never in general company, and very rarely with each other, did the aunts discuss such distressing subjects as disease and death.

When a Mottisfont lay a-dying, the other members of the family would pretend to the last that all was well. "Thank you," they would reply to inquiries; "we are quite satisfied; we are not alarmed. The doctor is expecting a decided change for the better." It was thus in minor matters. Once a small

python escaped from a travelling menagerie into the Forest. It happened to be less than six feet in length, and as harmless as a dormouse and quite as sleepy, but Lady Albinia Jalland, of Queen's Jalland, refused positively to sleep with her bedroom window open, and Miss Bungay wrote to the Stores to ask if it were possible to procure a mongoose. Within a week the Foresters believed that the python had consumed a pony, and, with appetite properly whetted, was not likely to exercise any discrimination in favour of bipeds.

A few days later the monster was discovered fast asleep under a holly-bush not a hundred yards from the spot where it had escaped. During this anxious season the Misses Mottisfont assured their visitors that there was no cause for serious alarm; but everybody knew that the ladies never set foot in the Forest for a fortnight, and were beginning to talk of taking a change of air at Avonmouth.

Presently they put out some old linen, and, the carrier happening to call, ordered a supply of camphor to be bought in the nearest town. Two days later they drank tea at the Park. Sir Giles did not disgrace his breeding by displaying excitement, but he expressed surprise that he should have been singled out, when it was notorious, all over the Forest, that Admiral Pundle's cottages at Pundle Green were in infinitely worse condition than anything to be found at Hernshaw Parva.

When he was eating his second slice of seed-cake, he spluttered out :

"Joy asks for a hundred pounds!"

"Joy?"

"She has assumed the direction of everything, acting in George Vennable's name. She is writing to Mollie against my wish, against my wish."

He shook his head, murmuring to himself, with an uneasy expression upon his handsome face, as if he were fairly moithered by the aggressiveness and initiative of the rising generation. A stranger, noting this expression, might have inferred that Sir Giles was not quite sure of himself, a terrible catastrophe to happen to a Mottisfont, and he the head of the family!

"Joy undertakes too much," said Miss Priscilla.

"She is up-to-date," said Miss Lavinia.

"I dislike that word. Don't let me hear it in this house."

Sir Giles glared helplessly at his sisters, sensible that Joy would have her own way in the end, and that he was powerless to grapple with a new world in which the new woman was the most conspicuous figure in the landscape. He rumbled on :

"Joy places the responsibility of—of *this* on me!"

"On you, Giles?"

"She does indeed. She upsets me very

much, more than I allow her to realize. God knows I have tried to do my duty. I have lived here; I have spent my money amongst my own people. Joy says I rear too many pheasants."

"What has that to do with diphtheria?"

"You may well ask. I have always reared a certain number of birds. We were fortunate this year in escaping the gapes, and there was a very pretty show, if I say it. And I've always cared more about quality than quantity. And you two know that I generally walk with the beaters. It's years since I occupied one of the good stands. And I'm as fond of a high bird as any man, although I don't pull 'em down as I used to. Yes, she throws that in my teeth. Too many pheasants! And this scourge is my fault!"

"George Vennable ought to speak to her seriously. Sometimes, I dislike to say it, but, between ourselves, I really think that Joy, without meaning it, is almost blasphemous."

The stout butler, with a voice soft as mayonnaise sauce, announced:

"Mr. Vennable."

The parson accepted a cup of tea from the hands of Miss Priscilla. He had come to the Park for no reason other than to discuss a critical situation; but it would have been a violation of a code dear to the aunts had he plunged indecently into it.

"You walked, George?"

"Yes."

"The roads at this time of year are very muddy."

"True." The parson sipped his tea, thinking of his errand, but from long habit he returned platitude for platitude. "And the motors cut 'em to ribands."

At the word "motors" Sir Giles's face darkened. Motors were a symbol of progress which he abhorred. He regarded them with the same congested eyes with which his father had looked at locomotives. And always he would growl out :

"Motors! I won't have one. I hate 'em! Don't talk to me about motors."

"The roads will be worse before they are better," interpolated Miss Lavinia. "We shall have snow within twenty-four hours, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"The glass is falling," added the elder sister.

"Yes; and there's a case of diphtheria in Hernshaw Magna," said the parson."

"Good gracious!"

"Oh, damn it!" exclaimed Sir Giles.

George Vennable gave particulars in his clear, slightly cold voice. His presentment of facts was admirable, but he allowed Joy, as a rule, to deal with them. The family does, indeed, become the unit of national life when the daughter practises what the father preaches. When the parson finished a silence fell on the

Mottisfont. A rambling, inarticulate, vague recital would have provoked a torrent of questions ; but the grandson of a Lord Chancellor is likely to think and speak with a truly exasperating lucidity and finality.

"At Pundle Green——" began Sir Giles.

"Yes, yes, Giles; you are the scapegoat, of course. Meantime, this disease is raging in *your* cottages. Joy tells me she screwed fifty pounds out of you this morning."

"I want to speak to you, George, about Joy. You allow her too free a hand——"

"And too free a tongue," added Miss Lavinia, with a significant cough.

"Giles, you must make it a hundred, and the rest of us will do what we can. Joy has written to Mollie: I saw the letter. She wrote: 'If you are hard up, send your diamond and turquoise aigrette.'"

The parson chuckled: the Misses Mottisfont looked down their aquiline noses.

"You permit that?" said Miss Priscilla austerely.

"Mollie will send a cheque."

"The family will do its duty, I trust, George; but I think—we all think—that you allow Joy to usurp your prerogatives. You ought to have approached Giles; you ought to have written to Mollie."

"Tut, tut!" said George Vennable. "In the bosom of this family let it be candidly admitted that I ought to do many things which, constitu-

tionally and temperamentally, my dear Priscilla, I am unable to do. Leave it at that, like a dear, good soul! One more cup of tea, please; and, Giles, make it a hundred."

"I haven't got a hundred!"

"Sell that cabinet."

He indicated, with an inexorable forefinger, a beautiful specimen of Sheraton's best period. Sir Giles gasped. The aunts raised their hands in horror.

"Really, George, you are too absurd!"

"It's worth five hundred pounds, at least," said the parson, lying back and enjoying himself. "And I know a clever little man in Westchester who'll copy it exactly for thirty pounds. The difference will put everything straight, and leave you enough over to buy sherry instead of marsala."

"That cabinet belonged to my great-grandmother."

"This is enough to make her turn in her grave," said Miss Priscilla.

"Tut, tut!" said George Vennable again. "The good soul is wiser now than when she lived in the Forest of Ys."

"Joy gets her ideas from you," said Sir Giles, in a hollow tone. "I knew it, I knew it!"

"You are mistaken, Giles. I get my ideas from her. And, mark you, they are in the air; England is saturated with them. Would you rather see your own people die than sell a

cabinet which belonged to your great-grandmother?" His tone became very contemptuous, although a pleasant smile tempered it. "Well, well, I'm getting too warm, Joy's young blood has infected me. And it's easier to preach than to practise, which was about the only really adequate reason for my becoming a parson. You will, of course, do as you please."

"If I must make it a hundred, I shall make it a hundred," said Sir Giles, with majestic simplicity. Long ago he had been grieved, and had not scrupled to say so to his sisters, because George Vennable's manner was so unparochial.

"Capital!" said George Vennable. "I'm glad I came up. And you two will help," he smiled pleasantly, rubbing his thin scholar's hands together.

"We shall do our duty: we have never tried to dissociate ourselves from what we conceive to be our duty."

"We must pay our bills. Joy says we've been taking things too easy. I dare say we have: our lines lie in pleasant places."

He glanced at the saloon in which they were sitting: a fine room, nobly proportioned, and filled with very delightful furniture and portraits. Upon everything rested a sort of bloom, not of youth, but of age. Colours which half a century before may have clashed had now faded to a mellow harmony of tint, in which a warm red predominated. The

curtains were of genuine Florentine brocade; the gilded wooden frames of the pictures had assumed a quiet and unobtrusive tone.

In this room George Vennable, then a distinguished don at Oxford, had met his Alicia. Nothing had changed since then; not a piece of furniture had been moved; the tea equipage was the same. But the people about the octagonal tea-table were five-and-twenty years older. During that period the parson had buried his wife and his ambition; and now he had Joy, dear child—dear, good child—and his collections. Poor old Giles had nobody. Of his seven children not one remained to cheer his declining years. Two were dead, three sons were out in the world, the girls had married neighbours. One was the wife of Colonel Jalland's eldest son, and the other, not without much consideration, had consented to become the helpmate of the rector of Hagley Marsh, the Rev. Archibald Starkey, who had abundant private means, and was quite likely to be made a Colonial Bishop.

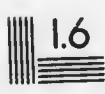
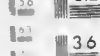
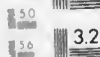
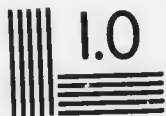
"Yes, yes," said Sir Giles, thawing under the geniality of George Vennable's manner. "You are right, my dear fellow: we have had much to be grateful for; and this confounded plague must be fought tooth and nail. We are lucky to have young Tisdale; a very clever fellow, young Tisdale, sound, very sound. I understand he was sent for at once?"

"Joy sent for him," said the parson, smiling



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faintly, sensible of his own limitations and the limitations of those about him. He knew—none better!—that before God and man this inflated, stupid, kindly, complacent egotist was the murderer of little Nellie Mowland. And he, George Vennable, had been accessory before the fact. Had he chosen to pit his powers of persuasion against the other's obstinacy, the sties would have been swept away long ago. The parson stroked his well-shaven chin and smiled, but in his blue eyes lay shadows. Sir Giles was absolutely assured that he, as landlord, had done all that was possible. George Vennable never wilfully deceived anybody, not even himself.

"Dr. Snelgrove is *our* medical attendant," remarked Miss Priscilla. "We have more confidence in a man of years and experience."

George Vennable shook his head.

"My dear lady, parsons, doctors, and schoolmasters ought to be young and strong, and keen." He pushed back his chair. "Good-night, Giles; good-night, Priscilla. We received the parcel of linen, Lavinia. Many thanks."

He was escaping when Miss Priscilla called him back. Such an opportunity for discussing matters of grave domestic import might not occur again.

"One moment, George."

"Certainly."

He turned. Miss Priscilla had risen, but

Lavinia remained seated, her mouth open, her eyes protruding, a wrinkle between her arched eyebrows, as if she were wondering what her elder sister was about to say, and doubtful whether she could say it adequately on the spur of impulse. Sir Giles had crossed to the chimney-piece to ring the bell. He, too, paused, standing on the hearthrug, adjusting his pince-nez, staring at his sister with uplifted nose and chin, as if snuffing something unexpected.

"You know, of course, that Esmé Burgess has left the village?"

"We speeded his departure."

"Is it indiscreet to ask if there is any understanding between the young people?"

George Vennable twisted his lips into a whimsical smile.

"There is more true understanding between those two than between all of us put together, but you don't mean that."

"I don't mean that, George, and I don't believe it. You know what I mean. There has been some talk."

"You drive me into a corner. Officially, I know nothing, but I suppose there is what you call an understanding. Joy might do worse."

"She might do a deal better," snapped Miss Priscilla.

"What has the young man got?" said Sir Giles heavily, but with a gleam of interest in his eye.

Marriages of kinsmen were serious affairs, because, if arranged upon lines not sound, the high contracting parties were likely to come to want, and then become an incumbrance upon heads of families. Esmé Burgess had reckless blood in his veins.

"He has five hundred a year," replied George Vennable; "and with his fellowship, and what he makes by scribbling——"

Sir Giles held up his hand.

"No young fellow in his position should marry upon less than a thousand a year."

He glanced at the aunts, who never failed him upon these occasions.

"I quite agree," said Miss Priscilla.

Miss Lavinia murmured:

"The minimum!"

George Vennable edged nearer the door. His blue eyes were twinkling as he fired a Parthian shot.

"In any case," he said lightly, "I shall give Joy a free hand in the choice of a husband. She must marry to please herself, God bless her! not to please me—or you. Good-night."

He walked home, not quite so briskly as usual, thinking of Joy and the future. He had reason to believe that he would not make very old bones, and to-night his responsibilities as father and parson added a new burden to increasing years. He sighed more than once, and blinked at the stars, which did not

seem, somehow, to shine very clearly. Twice he splashed into puddles, much to his exasperation, because he was scrupulous about the condition of his clothes.

"Dear me!" he muttered. "There are a lot of puddles!"

Then the philosophic habit came to his rescue. Mortals, he reflected, had to walk in the dark sometimes, with no better light than stars twinkling behind wracks of cloud; and, pick one's way how one might, a man could hardly hope to escape puddles.

Accordingly, he pushed on with a longer step till he reached the Rectory, where Joy was awaiting him with a smile upon her lips. Invariably, if at home, she welcomed him like this, and perhaps he had come to accept such oblations as a matter of course. But to-night, when she brought his slippers and settled him into an easy chair by the fire, he glanced at her with apprehension.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

He laid his hand upon her arm.

"As I came home, I wondered what I should do without you."

She laughed gaily.

"You darling old fuss-pot! You don't think that I'm in any danger?"

"Not from diphtheria, perhaps."

"Good gracious! What do you mean?"

"If you should marry the wrong man——"

"The wrong man?" For an instant she

stared at him almost stupidly. Then she laughed again, bending down to kiss his forehead. With her forefinger she tried to rub a wrinkle from between his eyes as she said: "Don't worry; I'm not thinking of marrying the wrong man. I say, I hope you screwed a few more pounds out of Uncle Giles."

"I think he'll make it a hundred."

"We shall want double, now that the disease has spread to Hernshaw Magna. Do you know that Mr. Charters, Esmé's friend, offered to help with money? Wasn't it awfully nice of him?"

"Awfully," repeated George Vennable absently.

"Beard or no beard, I'm beginning to like that man, which doesn't seem to interest you at all; and you're still frowning. I shall have to tell you my precious secret."

"Your precious secret?"

He was alert enough now.

"Yes. I have a golden plover for your dinner. There!"

Presently she bustled away to tell the cook to be sure not to over-roast the wonderful bird. George Vennable sat in his chair, not reading the book which Joy had placed ready to his hand. Instead, he stared into the depths of the fire. He was of an age when men come slowly to conclusions, and are loth to abandon them. He had supposed that there was "an understanding" between Esmé Burgess and

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Joy; and now, with alarming suddenness, conviction seized him that she was heart-whole, although undoubtedly the young fellow was very much the reverse. He smiled, wondering whether he was the most selfish old man in the Forest of Ys.

CHAPTER XIII

Joy heard the truth from Frank Tisdale, and all the truth, because he knew what manner of woman she was.

One can best describe him by saying that he was the antithesis, physically and mentally, of Dr. Snelgrove, the medical attendant of the Misses Mottisfont, the Bungays, the Jallands, and the Pundles. Tisdale had an enormous and badly paying practice in a suburb of Easthampton. Dr. Snelgrove, living in Ys, which may be called the heart of the Forest, paid his visits sitting at ease in a comfortable brougham drawn by a couple of grey horses, an equipage which would have been no discredit to Harley Street. Tisdale rattled about in a motor, which he steered himself; and it is to be feared that he often exceeded the legal limit of speed. Snelgrove was a type, not an individual. He represented the old school, now almost extinct, and washed his pink face and white hands with more care—so it was said—than he bestowed upon his instruments. His manner in cases of bereavement (his word) was nicely adjusted to the position and fortune

of the bereaved. Lady Albinia Jalland, as the daughter of a marquess, and a Shropshire marquess into the bargain, gave utterance to an opinion, repeated by others of less high degree, when she said that "dear Dr. Snelgrove was a tower of strength in the hour of need." If things went very wrong, as they did with poor little Mrs. Bungay, Dr. Snelgrove humbly admitted, with unaffected piety and in half a dozen felicitous phrases, that a greater Physician had taken the case out of his hands. The finite prostrated itself to the Infinite: a beautiful and precious thought, as Miss Priscilla justly observed. A radical dentist, a very common fellow, had the impudence to assert that Snelgrove's success was entirely due to his admirable treatment of the healthy. During times of dangerous illness, full-blooded relatives were discreetly enjoined to nourish themselves properly, and not to allow any falling of the system below par. This solicitude for the living, when less sympathetic practitioners might be too much concerned with the dead, had endeared Dr. Snelgrove to many influential neighbours. In person he was portly, bland, and pulpy. He wore white whiskers, and had a commanding brow.

Compared with this Olympian, Frank Tisdale cut but a sorry figure, with a keen, sallow, weather-beaten face and hard, long, lean body. He devoted himself to the sick, fighting disease desperately and to a finish. Unhappily, his

treatment of the full-blooded indicated want of tact. He had no hesitation in accusing them of criminal negligence and indifference; he docked them of food and sleep; he told respectable, God-fearing, rate-paying tradesmen that they were too intent upon filling their tills; he stuck pins, so to speak, into fat, sluggish servants; he had no respect for the cloth of a clergyman of the Church of England unless it covered something more than convention and deportment.

For more than three years Tisdale had been in love with Joy. He was aware that she liked him, and, being an optimist by temperament, hoped that liking would warm into love. Hitherto, his profession had engrossed him; and his income had barely sufficed for his own needs. Of late, however, his practice had percolated into the rich residential quarters of Easthampton; and it was known that he had been highly spoken of by more than one London celebrity. Tisdale knew well enough that the years of lean kine were past.

He knew also that interminable work, the drudgery of an immense practice, had turned him into something approximating to a machine. His very thoughts were automatic. Each case, in daily practice, had to be taken on merit, considered dispassionately, and then pigeon-holed. This pigeon-hole habit fastens itself inexorably upon all very busy men. A leisurely chewing of the cud of pleasant thoughts, dear to true

lovers, becomes impossible of achievement. Tisdale kept Joy in a shrine, and gazed at the distracting image furtively, as a schoolboy glances at his watch towards the close of a tiresome lesson. She represented innumerable delights which he had forsworn: the fragrance of spring, holidays, sympathetic human intercourse, romance, the idealities.

The fact that he was a machine did not trouble him much. In an utilitarian age machines were needed. In fine, it rather pleased him to think of himself and others as complicated pieces of mechanism whom only a skilled workman could keep in perfect order. Also he held in abhorrence and contempt any interference on the part of duffers and bunglers.

After his inspection of Hernshaw Parva, he said curtly :

"There's any amount of trouble ahead. We shall want nurses—and I don't know where to find 'em. The 'flu is raging in Westchester and Easthampton. The hospitals are full. It's not easy to get nurses from London."

"Tell me what to do, and I'll try and do it."

"We must enrol every capable amateur."

Within a week a dozen children were down with diphtheria, and three adults. Two hastily-appointed village nurses were being overworked, and the National School had

closed its doors. This meant dozens of youngsters at home all day long and exposed to contagion in ill-ventilated, stuffy cottages. Each morning Sir Giles rode down to the village upon a stout, bobtailed, hog-maned cob. He would stare at his pretty, picturesque thatched pest-houses, protruding a dubious under-lip. In his too-prominent eyes lay that half-furtive, half-frightened expression of which mention has been made. What he really thought could only be matter for surmise; no word escaped him except a few inarticulate interjections. However, as Chairman of the Board of Guardians, he called a special meeting, and made a rambling speech, standing rigidly upright, with his left hand tucked into his waistcoat, a pose adopted in the portrait presented to him by grateful Foresters upon his resignation of the Ys Hounds.

When he finished no one was much the wiser, but the Board understood vaguely that the issue lay in the hands of Providence, and that they, accordingly, were relieved of further responsibility. Tisdale heard of this from Joy next day.

"Damn them!" he said, with singular intemperance. "Damn them!"

He quite forgot that he was addressing the niece of the Chairman.

"Thank you," said Joy demurely.

"You say they have done—nothing?"

"An intercessory prayer will be offered up on Sunday."

"Good Lord, deliver us!"

Joy looked at him; then she said quietly:

"I am quite sure that He won't. We must deliver ourselves."

"Yes, yes; and a temporary hospital is the first thing. The Board could have ordered that."

"Who pays?"

"It comes out of the rates, of course."

"I see," said Joy, frowning.

Sir Giles paid most of the rates.

"We must find some sort of a place," said Tisdale.

"Sarah Owbridge has a large cottage." Then, suddenly speaking with an impulse which she did not have time to analyse, she added: "I wish you would talk things over with Mr. Reginald Charters. He knows all about cholera and yellow fever."

"Does he? What is he doing here?"

"He is a licensee, and he lodges with Sarah."

Tisdale's upper lip curled. He liked a day's shooting as well as any man, but undivided energies given to sport in any form provoked his contempt. He had no wish or intention of talking to Charters, but he thought he could deal with Sarah Owbridge, at whose door his motor presently stopped. Just outside the porch a tall man, with a closely clipped,

pointed beard, was taking game from another man, whom Tisdale recognised as Tom Henbest.

"You're Dr. Tisdale?"

"Mr. Tisdale. Am I speaking to Mr. Charters?"

"Yes. Are things mending?"

"Things are worse," growled Tisdale. The sight of Hugo, cool, strong, capable, exasperated him. The fellow had been shooting all day. Some feeling escaped when he added, looking at the game: "You seem to have rather a good bag."

"May I offer you a couple of snipe?"

"No, thanks. If you would send them up to the Rectory——"

"Certainly, with your compliments. I don't know Mr. Vennable."

"But you know his daughter?"

"I have met her—twice," said Hugo tranquilly. "Have you called to see Mrs. Owbridge or me?"

Tisdale opened his eyes. Did this licensee read thoughts? Had he divined that he, Tisdale, had suddenly changed his mind, and meant to take a stranger into his confidence?

"I want to see you and Mrs. Owbridge," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

Hugo led the way into the sitting-room, which looked particularly warm and cosy. Mrs. Owbridge appeared with tea-things. Tisdale refused a chair, declared that he never

touched tea, and began to state his errand with very unprofessional bluntness.

"We must have a hospital," he said. Then he looked hard into Sarah Owbridge's small, grey eyes, which twinkled dully. "Would you let us have this house, Mrs. Owbridge?"

"I have a lodger, sir." She added shrewdly, "And a very good one."

"You would be doing the right thing, and it will be worth your while. Somebody will have to pay handsomely."

"Who, sir, if I may make so bold?"

Tisdale smiled, sensible that he had rushed, so to speak, at a rather formidable obstacle. The Board of Guardians might, it is true, be compelled to pay, but any action on their part would be interminably slow. Meantime children were dying.

"I could clear out," said Hugo slowly.

"How many lodgers will come here next Easter when they find out this 'as been turned into a 'ospital?"

"That must be taken into account, of course."

Sarah shook her head.

"I should appoint you matron, at thirty shillings a week."

"Well, sir, I ask again, who's a-going to pay for all this?"

"Mrs. Owbridge," said Hugo, "will you let me discuss this with Mr. Tisdale? It's not necessary to assure him—is it?—that as far

as fear of the infection goes you are far above any such weakness. I saw you coming out of the Mowlands' cottage yesterday."

"What! against my positive orders?" exclaimed Tisdale.

"Well, sir, to my notion the law o' God A'mighty comes before the law of man."

With this parting shot, Sarah left the room.

"Tea's very good," murmured Hugo.

Tisdale sat down.

"I'll have a cup. Look here, I see you know how to manage women. You needn't shake your head. Soft-soap is necessary sometimes. I don't use enough of it."

"Aren't you using some now?"

"I'm cornered. Those confounded Guardians! I can't wait till half the children in Hershaw are buried. And our district Medical Officer——"

This individual—a Forester, also—had made an inspection. As a result, a very large quantity of carbolic acid, not properly diluted, had been sprinkled in the small gardens about the cottages. The acid had killed every green thing it touched without, of course, doing a scintilla of good. According to Tisdale, crucifixion was too easy a death for the Medical Officer. Hugo listened to keen, incisive, convincing phrases, sensible that the young surgeon's enthusiasm and indignation had fired a spark in him. For many years he

had lived with people who gave, ungrudgingly, their best as well as their worst qualities to the pursuit of pleasure. In a word, comparing himself with Tisdale, he arrived at the conclusion that he had spared neither himself nor others in the desire to take life, while the surgeon had been as indefatigable in his passion—that was the right word—to save it. Perhaps, for the first time, he saw himself with the divine inner vision shrunk to Hyde-like proportions: the splendid man metamorphosed, by his own act, into an apish dwarf.

“Look here,” he said, slightly flushing: “can I be of any use, you know, in carrying out your orders? I’ve seen worse epidemics than diphtheria.”

“So Miss Vennable told me. Do you mean it, really?”

“Yes.”

“Right. In the first place, if you can persuade Sarah Owbridge to give us this house——?”

“I can.”

“Tell her she’ll get her money in time.”

“I’ll make that perfectly clear.”

“Meanwhile, those Purkesses——”

“What of them?”

Again Tisdale exploded. Purkess, having taken the responsibility of bringing thirteen children into the world, felt that he had done more than his part. Mrs. Purkess, poor soul,

with a weak mind in an exhausted body, had discovered gin to be a never-failing pick-me-up in domestic emergencies. Three children, in a condition that exacted unremitting attention and care, were dependent upon a father who couldn't stop awake, if a battle were raging, after nine in the evening, and a mother who tumbled. Joy, it seemed, had passed the previous night in the cottage, and had announced her intention of passing this one also.

"I'll take that job," said Hugo. "Tell me exactly what to do. Hold on! I'll make a note or two."

A couple of hours later he tapped at the door of a ramshackle cottage, prettily situated half-way up the hill, with the pigsties and cesspool of the cottages just above draining—in obedience to the laws of gravitation—into the small hollow where it stood.

Hugo had admired this cottage from the outside, reflecting, as he went to and from the golf-course, what an admirable subject it presented for an artist: a typical example of one of these rural scenes so dear to the heart of the right-thinking Briton, and so often recalled by him with grateful emotion and pride, when contemplating other cottages in other lands less favoured than his own. A heavy thatched roof, exquisitely toned by lichens and mosses, surmounted brick walls plastered

white. The bricks beneath the plaster were rotten, but the plaster, shining through masses of honeysuckle and clematis, illuminated pleasantly Sir Giles Mottisfont's earnest wish to, as he phrased it, "put a good face on things." Door and casings were painted a bright apple-green. Behind lay the Forest of Ys—an incomparable background. In front was a small garden, gay in summer-time with such flowers as hollyhocks, larkspur, stocks, and what the children call "red-hot pokers." The Misses Mottisfont took particular pride in the Hernshaw gardens. They presented packages of assorted seeds to deserving tenants, and prizes to be competed for at the annual flower-show always held in the Park.

Sir Giles was inordinately proud of this flower-show, and made a point of filling his house with guests, to whom he would murmur: "I think my people appreciate what I do for them. I should like to show you my cottages. There are none prettier in England, though I say it. We'll stroll through Hernshaw Parva on Sunday afternoon."

And to see this upright, portly, cleanly-shaven English gentleman taking the air with his guests upon a Sabbath afternoon, to hear him expatiate, in language as carefully chosen as his neckcloth, upon the privileges and duties of conscientious, stay-at-home landlords, to mark him as he waved his gold-mounted malacca, indicating with complacent sweep the

boundaries of his domain, was to apprehend with feelings of mingled awe and admiration the secret of England's greatness.

Hugo was received by Joy in the small parlour, where nothing offended eye or ear, although an acute nostril might have detected the cloying odour of the juniper penetrating the robuster fumes of carbolic acid. In this parlour were five children and their sire. The children not yet attacked exhibited a somewhat pathetic excitement. Their eyes shone brightly. Hugo recognised one of the boys as a caddy, and spoke a word to him. Purkess, half asleep after a heavy supper, stood up, a lumbering, powerful clown, significant of that amazing *vis inertiae* which had kept his family in one place for nearly a thousand years.

Joy drew Hugo aside. He saw that her face was very white and drawn, but an indomitable spirit shone in her eyes.

"You will be horribly shocked," she whispered.

She led the way into the next room. Beyond this was a small closet, whence proceeded unmistakable sounds: the stertorous breathing of the drunken mother. In the family bed, which, owing to some unevenness in the floor, presented with absurd significance an appearance of inebriety, lay three children. One of these breathed stertorously also, as if it were mimicking the mother a few feet away. Its tiny face was congested. Joy touched

Hugo, and shook her head. Then she glanced at a watch worn in a leathern strap round the wrist.

"The doctor will be here in two hours," she whispered. "Perhaps I had better stay till then."

"Can you do a single thing which I can't do?" asked Hugo curtly.

"N-no."

"Then obey the doctor's orders, and go straight to bed. I have my instructions."

He pulled out his notebook.

"The eldest girl," said Joy, pointing to the quietest and palest of the three, "is slightly better, but appallingly weak. You must watch her. If she tried to sit up, for instance, her heart would probably stop."

"Right," said Hugo. "Show me the medicines."

With almost professional coolness and quickness she indicated the position of everything needful. Then a smile flickered across her face as she nodded and left the room.

Hugo sat down near the bed. He was curiously aware that with the passing of Joy some indefinable beneficent spirit seemed to have passed also. He remembered his conviction that high health was as contagious as disease. Then the door opened quietly, and he saw her face in the shadows. She came to him, putting her sweet mouth close to his ear. The intimate movement, her breath upon

his cheek, the light touch of her hand upon his elbow, thrilled his pulses.

"There is a nurse in the next cottage. She remains till morning. If anything unexpected happens, wake up Purkess, and send him for her."

Hugo nodded.

"You may have to kick Purkess."

"I shall do so—with pleasure."

Her fingers lightly pressed his elbow, an acknowledgment of sympathy and appreciation of his humour. Hugo had wondered whether a big emergency would destroy in her that sense of comedy which overspreads all things, and which hitherto had kept her absolutely free from any taint of priggishness. Now he was glad to think that she had pressed his elbow and smiled. He had seen strong men go almost mad when confronted with horrors they were unable to mitigate. Joy's white, drawn face had alarmed him, but it was surely well with her so long as she could smile at the probability of Purkess being kicked.

For half an hour at least there was nothing to do. He sat thinking, with his eyes on the three heads on the pillow. The smallest child, who breathed so pitifully like her mother, was far the worse of the three; and it seemed to Hugo that she grew worse while he watched her. He found himself counting the breaths, as he used to count waves. The seventh always appeared—no doubt it was only fancy—to be

the most laboured: a veritable spasm, as if delicate tissues were being torn apart.

The eldest child was awake, although she lay with eyes closed, exhausted by the deadly struggle against millions of unseen enemies. She knew that a stranger had taken the place of Miss Joy, and that he would sit there in her chair till the doctor came. The little boy in the middle of the bed moved restlessly, and moaned in his sleep—faint cries which possessed a curiously penetrating power: the poignant appeal of the utterly helpless. Face to face with disease and death, Hugo became super-sensitively conscious of his own health and strength. Physically, he had not felt so extraordinarily "fit" for some years. Naturally a temperate man so far as meat and drink were concerned, he had, however, obeyed the apostolic injunction by eating without thought whatever was set before him, and this included the best of everything and much too much of it. Another year or two of the fleshpots of Mayfair, and he would have acquired the ripe, overfed look of that swashbuckling ex-major of Lancers who had acclaimed him as "Old Sport." A few weeks of hard exercise and the plainest food had given back to him the elasticity and exhilaration of youth.

Unquestionably, this recuperation would have been less marked had Hugo allowed his mind to dwell upon either the past or the future. He had deliberately put these from him, living in

and for the present alone, and in this he had been wise with the wisdom of the bear, who curls himself up in his snug winter quarters without any morbid misgivings as to whether a square meal will be procurable when he tumbles out in the spring.

Presently the throat of the eldest patient had to be painted. The taking of temperatures and the painful swallowing of milk followed. The children were very docile—a bad sign. They obeyed orders, sinking back on to their pillows without speaking a word; but the third child was unconscious, and quite unable to take either milk or medicine. Hugo watched it more keenly, wondering if it would pull through, knowing (for Tisdale had told him) that he could do nothing except look on at the final struggle between Nature and Death.

Believing the child to be growing worse, he laid his finger upon her wrist. To his surprise the pulse was slower and less wiry than it had been half an hour before. He put the clinical thermometer beneath her arm. Another surprise: the high temperature was falling. And yet, surely, surely the child was dying. Each breath rattled in the small throat.

He glanced at his watch. Nearly an hour and a half had passed. Within a few minutes Tisdale would be here—Tisdale, who had predicted a higher temperature and a galloping pulse.

Suddenly, as if by inspiration, he understood.

The child was better; Nature had conquered; and—oh, irony of Fate!—she would die all the same, not of diphtheria, but of suffocation. He hesitated a moment, and then went into the parlour. What was left of the Purkess family was sound asleep.

Hugo sent the father hot-foot for the nurse, and went back into the bedroom. The child's complexion was perceptibly darker, and there was a convulsion of the limbs, a clenching of the tiny fists, with every breath that was drawn. He laid his finger upon the throat; it was hard to the touch, swollen and slightly discoloured. Would the nurse never come? And when she came, what could she do?

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW minutes later he heard Purkess's heavy step upon the brick-laid path, and then, bringing with her a faint fragrance of the Forest, the nurse entered.

She was small, but erect and alert, with a pair of round eyes that reminded Hugo at once of a robin's, being singularly bright and quick in their movements. She flashed a glance at him, nodded, and bent over the convulsed child. At her touch she seemed to become better, but the hard rattle in the throat continued.

"She's been getting worse," said Hugo.

Purkess stood in a corner of the room looking on, wide awake and frightened out of his life. From the closet came the heavy, stertorous breathing of his wife. Upon his forehead the veins stood out; and when he wiped the sweat from his face his thick, hairy hands trembled. The helplessness of the man was pathetic.

"Can't you do anything?" whispered Hugo.

The nurse shook her head.

"Tisdale will be here in a minute or two."

"He'll arrive too late," she replied with authority.

He marvelled at her self-possession, her air even of contentment, and the indefinable expression of well-being, recognisable at once, but so hard to define. She was nearly thirty, but her clear, smooth skin had not a line upon it.

Suddenly Purkess began to sob violently.

Hugo looked with appeal at the nurse, who nodded her head. The poor fellow's grief had something terribly animal about it, something, too, not quite sane, like the fury of a horse that kicks out his master's brains in a moment of terror. Afterwards, thinking the incident over, Hugo decided that this tremendous ebullition of emotion indicated the revolt of ignorance against cruel circumstance, and the belittling sense of impotence so strange to a strong man.

The nurse went up to him and touched him.

"You musn't do that here," she said firmly. "You will disturb the others. Go into the next room."

Hugo felt that the man would curse her and refuse to budge, but he obeyed instantly, slinking away, convulsed with misery.

"Poor devil!" said Hugo.

Again the nurse nodded with her odd air of detachment, as if she were bound by some

oath to make no comment upon matters outside the sphere of her own particular business. Hugo hurried after the stricken father.

"Look here," he said, taking the man by the shoulders. "Pull yourself together! You're wanted, do you hear?"

Purkess raised his heavy face.

"Go to the bottom of the hill, and stand there. When the doctor comes, bring him on here at once. A minute or two may make all the difference. Run!"

The heavy face brightened. A minute later Hugo heard the man clattering down the hill. Action had touched him with healing fingers. Hugo went back into the inner room. The nurse had the child on her knee, trying, with all her art and experience, to soothe it.

"Is there nothing we can do?" whispered Hugo.

"If Mr. Tisdale were here, he would try tracheotomy. See!" She pressed the swollen throat. "There is the thickening; below the passage is quite clear. One tiny incision—and a tube! I've seen it done several times. I could do it with a sharp pair of scissors myself."

"Do it," said Hugo.

"I daren't."

"The child is dying."

"Yes, yes; but I daren't, I tell you, and we have no tube."

The words died on her lips as a worse spasm seized the child.

The struggle for breath was terrible to witness. The nurse had the child, face down, on her lap. Hugo looked on, feeling the sweat break upon his forehead. After an eternity the swollen throat relaxed for an instant, the breath passed through with a fierce gasp, the twitching limbs lay quiet.

"I thought she had gone then," whispered the nurse.

"You say the incision must be made in the windpipe, and held open by something?"

"That's it."

She stared at him, arrested by an expression upon his face that few had ever seen. The moment was intensely dramatic. Nurse and man knew that a life was being snatched because they lacked the skill to save it. That the man who could save it was close at hand, perhaps not more than half a mile away, made the situation infinitely more tragic.

The breathing began to grow laboured again. Ever since Hugo had been in the room these dreadful intermittences had taken place, and always the period of ease had been shortened. Another violent attack was about to begin.

Hugo hurried from the room. When he came back his face was impassive.

"I can't hear the motor," he said quietly.

The nurse gave a significant shrug of her

shoulders, and as she did so the child's legs curled up piteously—the spasm began.

"Oh!" said the nurse.

Into that one exclamation she condensed everything: her protest against the irony of Fate, against her own helplessness, against the torture she was about to witness, unable to alleviate it. She had passed the last seven years of her life in the hospitals, and might have been deemed case-hardened, but Hugo saw two tears trickling down her cheeks as she tried in vain to calm the twitching legs and writhing arms.

"I'll make the incision," said Hugo. "Show me the exact place."

She obeyed in silence, after one glance upward. She realised that protest was unavailing: he had counted the cost. Upon the table near the bed was a vessel of disinfecting fluid. She saw Hugo dip his penknife into it.

"A hairpin, please," he said, in the same even tones.

Again she obeyed, too bewildered to understand. He dipped the hairpin into the fluid, watching the child, but with ear intent for the distant toot of the motor.

"It's now or never," said the nurse desperately.

Afterwards she admitted that she was entirely dominated by Hugo. She had forgotten that he was a layman. From his cool manner, she might have supposed that at some time or

other he had practised as a surgeon. Nevertheless, she had waited till the last possible second; the child's face was livid.

"Keep the incision open with the hairpin," said Hugo.

Five minutes afterwards the motor roared up the hill.

Next day Hugo saw Joy for a few minutes. Everybody was frantically busy turning Jordan Cottage into a temporary hospital, but Joy led him aside and grasped his hands.

"Mr. Tisdale says that hairpin was inspiration."

"Yes," said Hugo stiffly, seeing the friendliness, the interest, the admiration in her frank eyes.

"And he tells me that you have guaranteed the money for this." She indicated the changes in Jordan Cottage. "Of course, the ratepayers will have to settle with you in full; but father and I are so grateful. Father will be down directly."

He moved slightly away from her, muttering:

"If the child had died, what then?"

"Because you took that risk. I—we"—her eyes sparkled—"shall never forget what you have done."

"I suppose, if it had been an only child, it would have died," said Hugo, with a grim smile.

His first meeting with George Vennable

followed. The parson said little—a few courteous, carefully chosen words—but plainly he was impressed. His clear blue eyes, which lacked the vitality of his daughter's, rested inquiringly upon Hugo, asking questions the tongue was too polite to put. In conclusion, he said nervously:

"You have set us an example, Mr. Charters. You have given me a lead over an awkward fence. I shall turn the Rectory into a hospital for Hernshaw Magna. I am going to see Praggon about it at once. Ah! here's Sir Giles."

Sir Giles rode up on his pampered cob. He had just heard the news—who had not? The Misses Mottisfont, at breakfast, learnt from pretty Esther that Mr. Charters had saved the life of her youngest sister, and by lunch-time they knew of what was happening at Jordan Cottage. Dr. Snelgrove, who happened to call about ten, damned the crusade with faintest praise. He was doubtful about antitoxin treatment—preferred old-fashioned, well-tried remedies. As for this stranger—a layman who had dared to perform such a delicate operation as tracheotomy—well, all he could say was that experiments of that sort were quite unjustifiable!

Fortified by this opinion, and by a glass of cherry brandy, which the Misses Montisfont had insisted upon their dear brother drinking, Sir Giles rode down to Hernshaw Parva.

"Mornin', George."

"Good-morning, Giles. How are you?"

"Only so-so," Sir Giles replied crossly. "This confounded animal bit me this morning when I was mounting him."

"Upon the principle that all flesh is grass, I suppose." Then, in his pleasant, leisurely voice he said: "Let me introduce Mr. Charters, Sir Giles Mottisfont."

Hugo bowed. Sir Giles inclined his head stiffly, the points of his starched collar making dents in his plump pink chin. He blinked owlishly at Hugo, whose glance was slightly disconcerting. Then he said irritably:

"What is this I hear about a hospital?"

The parson explained, with a twinkle in his mild eyes. Sir Giles frowned; his pink complexion assumed a shade of purple, not quite so becoming to him.

"I ought to have been consulted," he growled.

"You were consulted, and you did nothing."

Hugo slipped away.

"That young man," said George Vennable, indicating Hugo's retreating back, "has done what we ought to have done."

"I deprecate haste," said Sir Giles. "Who is this young man? What do you know about him? Where does he come from?"

"As to that, I can't answer you; he's a friend of Esmé Burgess. His pluck and common-sense saved one of the Purkess children last night."

"Priscilla informed me." He pursed up his lips. "That sort of thing appeals to the gallery, no doubt, but it's not sound, not sound."

"My dear Giles, forgive me, but I must say it—pooh!"

"Snelgrove—good man, Snelgrove—very sound man. Snelgrove says it might have been manslaughter."

George Vennable smiled. Into his blue eyes came a frosty light.

"Snelgrove is right. It might have been manslaughter. In Jessie Mowland's case it was manslaughter, and we—you and I, Giles—ought to be indicted."

"'Pon my word!"

"I take my share of the blame, but it's lighter than yours. And now, my dear fellow, if you won't help, don't hinder!"

The parson hurried into the cottage, leaving his portly brother-in-law agape with astonishment and apoplectic in appearance.

"He's a Rad, is George," he muttered, "a Rad. I always knew it. If this sort of thing is encouraged, the Forest won't be a fit place to live in."

He rode on. Opposite the tavern some children curtseyed low. A couple of men touched their hats, assuming the adulatory smirk so familiar in village streets, and so soothing to a certain order of mind. Sir Giles's brow cleared. His own people understood him. George Vennable, all said and done, was

an outsider. Sir Giles gave the children a threepenny-bit, and saluted the two men with affability. They were notorious loafers, but they never forgot to touch their hats to authority; and on that account authority, even on the bench, tempered justice with mercy. Sir Giles rode on till he came to the Mowland cottage. He remembered little Jessie, and intended to speak a word to Mrs. Mowland. She came out of the cottage as he approached. Two children stood beside her. The three dipped reverently as Sir Giles pulled rein. When he cleared his throat with a preliminary "Ahem!" they dipped again.

"Very sorry to hear you have lost one of your children, Mrs. Mowland."

"Two! Us have lost two," said the elder child excitedly.

"Impossible!" gasped Sir Giles, honestly shocked, and thereby putting a misleading inflection into his voice.

"Two!" repeated the child shrilly. "Two!"

"Don't ye dare to conterdict Sir Giles," said Mrs. Mowland sharply. Then, curtsying for the third time, she said miserably: "If you please, Sir Giles, it were two, it were indeed."

"I said two!" cried the child. "It'll be three to-morrer!"

"God bless me!" said Sir Giles. He was visibly upset, having the Mottisfont prejudice against dying in a hasty and undignified manner. In his rumbling voice he added: "You're

keeping these away from the others—quite right!"

"We can't, sir," said Mrs. Mowland. "It ain't possible. They've just got to take their chances, same as their fathers and mothers did afore 'em."

"Dear me!" said Sir Giles. "Well, well, we must try to accept these afflictions in the proper spirit. Send up to the Park for soup, or port wine, or—or anything else you want. Good-day."

After this, for a time, he rode along, pursing his lower lip, frowning, and muttering to himself. The ugly word "manslaughter" obsessed him, refusing to be exorcised till he happened to think of Admiral Pundle, of Pundle Green, generally admitted to be one of the right sort, a "true blue," who went out hunting although he was past eighty, and could drink his bottle of claret after dinner and a couple of glasses of his own famous Waterloo brandy. The Admiral's cottages were in a shocking condition. Inspired by the happiest of thoughts, Sir Giles jogged along till he came to Pundle Green, where he made an exhaustive survey of pigsties, stagnant ponds, and thatched roofs honeycombed with rat-holes. He spent nearly threequarters of an hour in this pleasant and profitable fashion, and trotted home much heartened by the shortcomings of an old friend and neighbour.

It is relevant, however, to mention that at

the next meeting of the Hernshaw Board of Guardians a sum of money insufficient to defray the expenses in connection with the establishment of temporary hospitals was unanimously voted.

Meanwhile Tisdale and Hugo and Joy had entered into partnership. It is true that during the following fortnight each saw but little of the others, but a cordial understanding had been established, which, insensibly, became more cordial and more intimate as the days passed. Gradually the disease was being vanquished.

And then, when Joy's gay laugh was once more heard, George Vennable was smitten. Tisdale brought the news to Hugo.

"He's a hale, vigorous man," said Hugo.

"Nothing of the sort! I doubt if he ever was vigorous as you and I understand the word. And what vitality he had lies in that cupboard in the dining-room with his manuscripts. His daughter has always known it. He has known it himself."

"But lately he was indefatigable——"

"Yes, yes. He told me that he held himself responsible. If things go wrong——"

"You'll pull him through, Tisdale."

"If I don't, Miss Vennable will never bear to look at me again."

Hugo opened his eyes. Tisdale's tone, and the expression upon his face, were unmistakable. So he too—— But surely he knew about

Burgess—knew that he hadn't a dog's chance? It was inconceivable that so keen a man should have failed to perceive what was visible to every child in Hernshaw.

"If anything happens to her father, there is Esmé Burgess."

"Do you mean her cousin?"

"Isn't he more to her than a cousin, Tisdale?"

"Why, he's a boy!"

"Um!" said Hugo. "Have you ever noticed the couples in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoon? There's seldom more than a year or two's difference between man and girl."

"I've always looked upon them as brother and sister."

With that he went his way, frowning. Hugo remembered that he had promised to warn Burgess if he found anyone poaching. That Tisdale should have fallen in love with Joy was the most natural thing in the world; and yet the conviction that it was so aroused a curious irritation, which he took no trouble to resolve into its elements. Also, he was quite sure that Tisdale's love for Joy was the real thing, in his case a passion not easily provoked and not easily appeased. During the past fortnight Tisdale had exhibited great qualities. Nothing stopped him. A dangerous antagonist in any competition.

Behind this, throwing it out with the vividness of a cameo, was the shadowy background of George Vennable's illness. Tisdale would

spend much time with Joy, and fight for her father's life with a skill and patience which must inspire fervent admiration and gratitude.

Perhaps Burgess ought to come back. He was now in London, up to his eyes in excitements connected with his work. The "New Brooms" were holding meetings and making things lively for the Government. Burgess had written to say that one of the big men in the newspaper world was profoundly impressed with their political principles, and likely to "stand in" with his millions.

That evening he wrote to the young fellow, telling him that George Vennable was seriously ill, and Tisdale in devoted attendance upon daughter as well as father.

"That would fetch me," thought Hugo, as he sealed the letter.

It did not fetch Esmé Burgess.

Perhaps there was enough of the Mottisfont in him to make him underrate Tisdale's claims as a suitor for Miss Vennable. There is still a prejudice against doctors, even in the minds of enlightened youths, particularly those who have distinguished themselves in academical fields. To Burgess, Tisdale was a slave, at the beck and call of the great unwashed, and therefore not quite free from their taint. He would have said, in public (and with sincerity), that the medical profession was one of the greatest and noblest; but, in private, he would have admitted that, as possible husbands for one's

sisters and cousins, doctors—and country practitioners especially—were not quite eligible. Romance and iodoform were chemically not to be combined. Burgess replied:

“I’m much distressed at your news; but, surely, diphtheria is not very dangerous to men of Vennable’s age. And he has always had wonderful health. I am writing to Joy. Your hint about Tisdale leaves me calm, but I’m awfully obliged to you for writing. I can feel for him, poor chap! All the same, he wouldn’t have a chance with Joy. *I know that.* I have been tempted to run down to Hershaw, but I’m no longer my own master. I have got at last that billet I wanted—assistant editor of the *Saxon*—and I’ve undertaken to make a series of speeches for the man the New Brooms are running at this by-election in Norfolk. We are going to have a tremendous tussle. Victory means a seat in the House for me, almost definitely promised. . . .”

Hugo put the letter away. Afterwards it might be interesting to look at, as adumbrating a great political career. Burgess was quite right about George Vennable. The diphtheria had attacked him lightly; Tisdale spoke already of a quick recovery, adding, of course, that the danger of a relapse could hardly be exaggerated. In both villages the epidemic, apparently, had run its course. Hard frosts ushered in the New Year. Icicles, upon which the sun sparkled, hung from the trees in the Forest;

upon all the ponds children were sliding. The diphtheria, nipped or numbed by the intense cold, ceased to be aggressive; and Hugo, finding his occupation of nurse at an end, remembered that he was still a licensee.

A few more days brought him face to face with a puzzling moral exigency. Till now he had scrupulously avoided any paths which might lead to a more intimate social intercourse with the Vennables. That Joy, quite innocently, had indicated such paths to him, he knew, and the knowledge brought with it a curiously bitter-sweet satisfaction. She desired his companionship! More, he was assured that his avoidance of those pleasant paths, which they might have trod together, had aroused her pride and pricked it. Why, in the name of the Sphinx, should they always part as friends to meet again almost as strangers? Had Hugo divined that this question was daily presented to Joy, he might have answered it directly by telling her his real name and the reasons why he had masqueraded as somebody else. Instead, he held his tongue, being obstinate, and, a stronger reason, fearful of losing her good opinion of him.

The moral exigency arose when she asked him to come to the Rectory to play cut-throat bridge with the parson and herself. Tisdale happened to be present when she preferred this very natural request. And Tisdale answered:

"Why, of course he will, and it will be a capital thing. I ought to have prescribed it before. An hour, not more, every evening."

But Joy looked steadily at Hugo, wondering why he was silent.

"Will you come, Mr. Charters?"

"With pleasure," he said quietly.

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CHAPTER XV

As he spoke he salved his conscience with the determination to tell the truth at the first convenient opportunity. The Vennables, in any case, had sought him, not he them; and it would have been almost impossible to have refused the Rector's invitation. Tisdale added a few words as soon as the men were alone.

"You will be doing a good deed," he said. "And look here: talk to the dear old man about things outside the Forest. Fancy what it has been: buried alive in Hernshaw Magna for five-and-twenty years, with the Pundles and the Bungays and the Mottisfontes all around him. Personally, I'd sooner associate with publicans and sinners, and—breathe it not!—so would he."

"I'm in rather a hole," said Hugo. "Look here, Tisdale: my name is Hugo Reginald Charteris, and, if you can be of the halfpenny papers, I'm one of the biggest blackguards in the kingdom."

"Phew-w-w!"

"That's why I've kept out of the Rectory."

Tisdale's eyes were very wide open. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Scapegoat is the word, isn't it?"

"I've been a fool and a knave," said Hugo slowly. "Two or three people have stripped the scales from my eyes, and you're one of them."

Then, very quietly, he added a few details. When he had finished, Tisdale understood that Hugo Charteris was bound to Angela Tempest; but whether or not the captive hugged his chains was an interesting problem which Tisdale felt unable to solve.

"I must tell the Vennables," said Hugo.

Tisdale screwed up his face, a grimace indicating not so much perplexity as a whimsical apprehension of two sides of a nice question.

"As to that," he said presently, "you will, of course, do what you think proper, but, as Vennable's doctor, I absolutely forbid you to tell *him* till he is stronger."

"If he can play bridge——"

"My dear fellow, bridge amuses him. Your story will distress him. You underrate his kindness of heart. After all, why should you tell them?"

"It's a sort of instinct."

"I understand that, and I respect such instincts. But in this particular case the truth can do no good, and may do some harm. Look at it this way! For the last month

you've been fighting this plague with us. We wanted you, black or white, badly. And we want you still. George Vennable wants you. Between ourselves, I'm worried about his heart. There is nearly always cardiac weakness after diphtheria. He must be kept quiet and amused. You can do it better than any man I know. Well, do it!"

"If I told Miss Vennable?"

"That's risky, too. You've seen enough of her to know that she's not a Pharisee, but I'm afraid she would judge you rather unmercifully. There was a case in this village——"

"I heard about that."

"And the word 'divorce' to a Mottisfont——oh, she's half Mottisfont: one must face that——is henbane. I don't suppose for an instant she read the full report of the trial——"

"Let us assume that she did, for the sake of argument. What then?"

Tisdale made a significant gesture. He was surprised that Charteris took things so coolly, almost with indifference. A phrase or two of McAllister's floated into his mind. The correspondent throughout the trial had exhibited brutal indifference: a sort of animal impassivity really distressing to witness in a highly civilized and Christian country. The learned judge, too, had been scathing on the same point.

"You mustn't try her too high. Why," he laughed, "it's rather difficult for me to recon-

cile what I know you are with what I believed you to be. They gibbeted you, didn't they?"

"Yes," said Hugo. "Haman hung no nearer heaven."

"And how can you explain things to her—eh?"

"I have no intention of explaining."

"If you don't, Charteris, I'm afraid that Joy Vennable will make it difficult for you to play bridge with her father. He's very sharp. There would be more or less of a scene, the one thing I'm anxious to avoid."

"I ought to have said 'No' at once."

"You said 'Yes, with pleasure.'"

"Then nothing is left but 'Important business in town.'"

"No, no; you take this too seriously." He looked keenly at Hugo. "Am I right in my conviction that this last month has been worth something to you?"

"It's been like bathing in Jordan."

"Jordan? I see. If you feel that way, I take it upon myself, as a physician, to tell you to keep on dipping; and mum's the word for the present."

Finally, Hugo was persuaded.

The first evening at the Rectory was very pleasant—so pleasant that Hugo was beguiled insensibly into pastures wherein he had not wandered for many months. He had the gift of being able to describe vividly places he had visited; and an eager light in the eyes of his

listeners lured him on and on, from country to country, as if he were personally conducting a small and select party of tourists, who had never been out of England before. When he stopped, George Vennable supplied the spur of the right word. Joy said nothing, but she listened even as Desdemona listened to the adventurous Moor. Bridge was forgotten.

George Vennable sat by the wood fire in his bedroom, for as yet he had not been allowed downstairs; and Joy sat on the low stool beside him, the ministering angel within reach of anything that might be required. Hugo sat opposite, on the other side of the hearthrug. From time to time the parson stretched out a thin white hand, which rested lightly upon Joy's head, and each time Joy took that hand and kissed it. That she did so in Hugo's presence was the measure of the stride he had taken in passing their threshold. When Joy kissed her father's hand for the first time, George Vennable caught Hugo's eye.

"Être avec ceux qu'on aime, cela suffit," he murmured.

"It does not quite suffice," said Joy, looking up into her father's face, "unless we take for granted that those whom we love love us. And it would not suffice, unless those we loved were comfortable and happy. I was miserable when I was alone with you and your rising temperature."

And then George Vennable had smiled at

Hugo, with a subtle derisiveness, as much as to say: "Joy, you see, loves me devotedly; and I, as you know, take all that she can give, and give little in return."

Hugo reflected that the parson might be Laodicean, and lamentably unparochial, and inordinately interested in *lepidoptera* and *fungi*, but, with all his failings, he was human.

As Hugo talked of Cashmir, where he happened to be wandering for the moment, he looked steadily at Joy.

In the shaded light of the lamp, with the fitful glow from the fire playing upon her hair and face, she looked a girl rather than a woman. Her attitude emphasised this. She was leaning against her father, her head upon the level of his knees. For the moment one could hardly conceive her to be self-reliant, authoritative, the "parson in petticoats"! The outward, masculine signs of autocracy had vanished: the inward feminine graces shone with a soft radiance, with an irresistible appeal.

For the first time in their intercourse Hugo saw clearly that, at core, she was quite other than what she had seemed. Hitherto she had not chosen to reveal herself to him. Why should she? Now, in the intimacy of such a scene as this, she cast aside her out-of-doors garments, appearing as the complement, not the substitute, of man; dependent upon him, leaning against him, relaxed into a soft and

alluring passivity. And in her eyes, no longer sparkling, but suffused with shadows, Hugo seemed to read a particular message for him, as if she wished him to understand that, alone with those she loved, she was always like this: a creature to be cherished tenderly and caressed, the eternal woman absorbing and radiating love, not happy or content—as she had just borne witness—unless those she loved were happy and content also.

Presently her father asked her to sing. Hugo felt rather uncomfortable, because there was no piano in the room. Surely she would not attempt a song without an accompaniment? Joy went out of the room, and returned in a minute with a guitar.

“She sings dear little songs to me,” said George Vennable.

Joy sat down in a shadowy corner, and began one of Moore's melodies, set to old-fashioned music. Hugo, who had heard the greatest singers, knew at once that she had been well taught; and he perceived as quickly that her voice, lacking power and compass, possessed instead a most enchanting flexibility and sweetness. There were tones and fractions of tones, alluring gradations, due, possibly, to some remarkable conformation of the vocal cords, which brought tears to the eyes—the tears that never fall, but return to the heart. Hugo paid but little attention to the words of the song. In his ears were the soft soughing of trees,

the lilt of running water, and, now and again, the clear trill of a bird.

Looking at the parson, he saw a strange rejuvenation: that unmistakable glow of youth so seldom seen upon faces of those past middle age. The music had transported the parson into some *pays du tendre*, where he had wandered happily long ago.

"Sing another," he murmured, as the last cadence rose and fell. She sang three more songs.

When she had finished Hugo knew that he had made the acquaintance of a third Joy. Truly she was a maiden of surprises. The echo of her voice awoke memories long dormant. In Mexico and Southern California he had listened to these pathetic, bewitching tones and semitones. And always they had seemed to reveal the past and illuminate it with a tender light of yesterday. The singers themselves had been of yesterday, the daughters of a primitive and patriarchal people. In their songs was embalmed the essence of pastoral lives: lives that could never be lived again in such countries as England.

"Thank you," said Hugo, in a low voice. "You have given me a very great pleasure."

"Balm for a tired heart," said the parson.

Joy laughed, and the spell was broken as she came out of the shadows.

"Who taught you?" Hugo asked.

"The most delightful old man—a Spaniard."

She plunged into a pathetic story of a foreigner, stranded in Easthampton, unable, possibly for political reasons, to return to his native land, but always yearning for it, and expressing that yearning in his music.

"It must be terrible," she concluded, "to be obliged to live," her voice sank, "and to die in a dull, dirty town when one has been born and brought up in the most lovely part of Arragon."

Hugo thought of Tisdale and Burgess. If she married one of them, her life would become urban, and must remain so. And with the wider knowledge which had come suddenly to him within the past two hours, he realized that she, being of Arcadia, a nymph of woods and streams, would never be able to adapt herself to the dun, formal streets and squares of a great city. He had been right when he divined that she would make a splendid helpmeet for a pioneer.

"Do you know," he said with hesitation, "that when you were singing those songs I had the feeling that you didn't quite belong to this century?"

The parson laughed, rubbing together his thin hands.

"She doesn't," he said incisively. Then, when Joy protested, he explained at length, in his easy, leisurely fashion: "This is the age of compromise, and she abhors compromise. Black is black, and white is white, to her."

Anything complex distresses her. She hates problems. Don't you, my dear?"

"I have not the patience or the brains to solve them."

"Her brains are all right." He addressed himself to Charteris, conveying the idea that this intimate personal talk was perfectly natural, and the seal, as it were, of a friendship just begun. "But she is half Mottisfont."

"That is the half I hate."

"Oh no, you don't. You hate the defects of the Mottisfontian qualities, not the qualities themselves, which are admirable."

Again he turned to Hugo, speaking as if Joy were not present:

"She makes a good many people in Hernshaw happy, and, in particular, one lazy old man, because she is happy herself, content with the simple pleasures of the passing hour, satisfied with small things because they belong to her. That is the true wisdom. She sings little songs to a guitar, but she will tell you that she has no ambition to sing big songs to a big public, to the accompaniment of a grand-piano."

"Not I," said Joy.

"I am different. I mean, I was different. I wanted to sing the big song. But now," he laughed pleasantly, as if sensible of the vanity of human ambitions, "I am like her; she has taught me the great lesson. Once I burned to discover a new continent. I found instead the *Boletus Vennabilis*."

At ten o'clock this first never-to-be-forgotten evening drew to a close, but the parson, most hospitable of men, insisted upon refreshment being offered to his guest. Hugo followed Joy downstairs and into the dining-room. Upon the table were sandwiches and whisky and Apollinaris.

"I made the sandwiches," said Joy. "I shall be insulted if you don't eat some."

Then, very seriously, she thanked him for coming.

"You have done father so much good. Really, you seemed a sort of Aladdin. And on your magical carpet we have visited all the delightful places we shall never see."

"Never?"

"Father will never see them, at any rate." Her voice faltered, almost broke, but she continued vehemently: "You have no idea what he really is. I dare say you have misjudged him. Everybody does. He has had great disappointments. And, of course, he ought never to have come here."

"Whatever he lost by coming, he gained—you."

The slight pause before the pronoun made her glance at him with a certain apprehension. If Joy had revealed herself as other than the Grand Vizier of her father, so also Hugo, in this seductive atmosphere of home, quite as unconsciously, let slip his mask of indifference and aloofness.

"Yes, he has me." Then she laughed nervously. "But I'm not so conceited as to flatter myself that I make up to him for what he lost."

"You do."

"No, no."

"Ask Esmé Burgess."

The sudden introduction of the young fellow's name had an effect. At once the talk ceased to be intimate. Burgess played gooseberry. They couldn't escape from him, or from what he had done, and was doing, and would be likely to do. He accompanied them to the hall-door. But at the very last he vanished.

"Are you coming to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Hugo.

For an instant, as her hand lay in his, as he felt the soft pressure of her fingers, so eloquent of the gratitude and liking that she could not translate into speech, he was tempted to fling prudence to the winds and say: "I am a leper, but you have touched me, and I am clean."

Instead, he said, with a curious chill in his voice:

"Good-night, Miss Vennable."

Other evenings followed. The intimacy deepened and widened. Joy always greeted Hugo with a smile; and he never paused to reflect what its absence would have meant to him. Also, being confirmed in his belief

that Joy would marry Burgess, he interpreted the smile as inspired by gratitude. He accepted it as backsheesh.

She proposed that they should play golf together. The epidemic had worn itself out: ten days had passed without a fresh case being reported, but Joy showed scars. Her colour was less bright; shadows lay beneath her eyes. Tisdale had prescribed golf as being preferable to quinine or iron.

She asked Hugo to play in the presence of the parson, who said briskly:

"Yes, yes, the very thing. Give her a game to-morrow."

So it came about that they played regularly upon the days when Hugo was not shooting. The Misses Mottisfont were unaffectedly shocked. For three evenings in succession the aunts discussed, from every point of view, the propriety of second marriages, of which, hitherto, they had disapproved. Unquestionably, if poor George Vennable had remarried some sensible woman after dear Alicia's death, Joy would not be playing golf with a tall handsome stranger, of whom nobody, not even Colonel Jalland, who went to town to have his hair cut, knew anything at all!

Hugo played golf, as has been said, like a professional, having, indeed, devoted as much time and ability to the ancient game as would have served to master a foreign language or higher mathematics. He was therefore able to

coach Joy, who hitherto had coached others; and in this, as in other matters, she found herself deferring to superior knowledge and experience. Add to this her speculations concerning a man who, with abilities far above the average, was seemingly satisfied with a life without definite aims. Hugo, in Joy's mind, loomed larger and larger as a huge note of interrogation.

Each day, too, she became more conscious of his singular intermittences of silence. He seemed to shy away from certain subjects. She did not know what he believed or disbelieved; and this, to anyone with Mottisfont blood in their veins, was exceedingly unsatisfactory. Joy and Sir Giles held this conviction in common: that in politics and religion one's flag ought to be nailed to the mast. Sir Giles was fond of saying: "What is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong." No man, for instance, with any pretensions to being considered "sound" could uphold the passing of such an iniquitous measure as the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. You might as well debate the propriety of free love or the nationalization of land.

However, Esmé Burgess was a peg upon which to hang conversation. The young fellow was doing brilliantly. There could be no argument about that. The big papers reported his speeches in full! Everybody said that he had won the Norfolk by-election off his own bat

The New Brooms, it was confidently predicted, were likely to make a clean sweep of it. The disaffected on both sides were asking questions and receiving staggering answers. "Down with Expediency!" had been adopted as a sort of battle-cry. In the New Year number of the *Saxon* Burgess published a remarkable article, setting forth in detail the lies told by both parties during the recent election. Nobody reading this paper could doubt that the truth was being presented by the *Saxon* as a substitute for soft-soap and bunkum.

"Burgess has come to stay," said Hugo.

"You really think so?"

"He will go very far."

In his mind was a vision of Burgess ascending triumphantly to the skies, scaling inaccessible peaks, and always carrying Joy with him. Well, if he could please her by predicting triumphs, by all means let him play the prophet.

They were now in mid-January, and the days had begun to lengthen. Hernshaw Magna and Parva displayed proudly a clean bill of health. Jordan Cottage was disinfected, swept, and garnished. The modest sign *Apartments* gleamed once more above the porch. One day Hugo read a paragraph in the *Morning Post*. John Tempest had returned from India. John, of course, had gone down to the Abbey for the cream of the hunting. The big house would look rather empty without Angela

and Poppet. Hugo had not received another letter from Angela, but he heard from the faithful Pixton of two visits to the flat and demands for information, discreetly withheld. Pixton, indeed, was instructed to say that his master was in the wilds, and therefore, presumably, beyond the zone of letters and telegrams.

Angela, indeed, and all she represented, seemed very remote. Hugo had become a boy again, and, like a boy, was able to banish from his mind disagreeable memories and associations. During this month, whenever he was alone, there came to him with extraordinary vividness certain scenes of his youth and childhood, when Cynthia had been his comrade and companion. Happy are they for whom such scenes have a definite message, for it means that youth is not dead in them. There had been endless expeditions in search of eggs of the rarer wild-fowl which nested in the Suffolk marshes and fens. To secure the booty they had risked duckings innumerable and much floundering through mud. Always they had returned in the wildest spirits, laughing and singing and inordinately hungry. Edward spoke of these jaunts generically as "gallivanting," not being able to understand an overmastering desire to escape from the commonplace rut. In the summer there were campings-out—a tent pitched in a wood, gipsy stews, smoke from a pine-cone fire, blazing

sunshine and drenching showers. Before Hugo went to Eton a favourite topic of conversation had been hidden treasure, chests full of doubloons and pieces-of-eight. In both lay a buccaneer strain.

This vagabond existence was renewed with a fuller intensity whenever Joy and Hugo plunged into the Forest of Ys. Hugo found himself talking to Joy as he had talked to Cynthia. He could not speak of the future, and it was so easy to recall the past, to compare notes and experiences common to each. Such prattle flowed on and on without any exasperating hesitations and silences. Nevertheless, silence lay between them like the sword of Sigurd; and Joy had an instinct that, if it were touched, pain might be inflicted.

One day an incident occurred which increased the intimate nature of their relations. Hugo had walked up to the Rectory as usual for a game of bridge, but he found the parson pottering about his cabinets, engrossed in some new arrangement of the Cloudy Yellows. Hugo sat down to talk to Joy, when suddenly, to their horror, George Vennable fell forward on to the carpet, and lay there insensible. Within a few minutes he was making light of what had happened, referring to it as an attack of giddiness: he had been too long upon his feet, had unwisely neglected to rest after

eating his dinner, and so forth. But Hugo divined from Joy's face that she was very seriously alarmed.

She insisted upon her father going to bed at once, and Hugo helped him upstairs, and then bade him good-night. Joy, during a minute when she was alone with Hugo, whispered that she would send for Tisdale early the next morning.

Tisdale, it appeared afterwards, frightened Joy badly. It is likely that he also regarded her as the strong, capable, self-possessed nurse, who had never lost hope when a terrible disease was raging. At any rate, he spoke plainly. He admitted that the lesion was serious and organic. At the end he reminded her that threatened men live long, particularly those whose heads are stronger than their hearts.

"Your father is too sensible to run risks," he said; "but it would be unwise to tell him what I have told you. You must watch him very carefully."

With that, being in a hurry, he went his way. Joy was aware that for some time, ever since the epidemic came to an end, Frank Tisdale had seemed to avoid her. Without a word passing between them, each apprehended the feelings of the other. Joy did not want a lover, but she resented losing a friend. She had an enormous respect, admiration, and liking for Frank Tisdale, which might or might

not develop into a warmer and more tender sentiment. Because of this, she listened, with apparent calmness, to his diagnosis. But when he had gone she felt desperate, and in such sore need of sympathy that she dashed off a note to Hugo entreating him to come at once to the Rectory.

The moment Hugo looked into her troubled face he guessed what had happened. She received him in the dining-room, standing close to the map of the Forest, which recorded in red so many joyous expeditions. The table was laid for luncheon: the two chairs side by side. To Joy and to Hugo everything in the room indicated eloquently the love that had bound father and daughter together, the love that had turned a dull little village, filled with stupid people, into a paradise.

She held out both her hands to Hugo.

"Thank you for coming," she said in a choked voice.

She was struggling to keep her self-control, knowing that she must break down unless a miracle happened. The strain had lasted for nearly two months. During that time she had confronted horrors with a smile, and laughed when nothing but laughter would have restrained tears.

"You are in trouble," said Hugo, speaking quickly and gripping her hands. "But master it, master it! Don't let it master you!"

Instantly she was sensible that she had sent for the right man.

"Yes, yes."

He felt her rigid muscles relax. Withdrawing her hands, she sat down to repeat what Tisdale had said. Hugo listened, filling in the gaps. When she had finished, she added piteously:

"He stood there," pointing to the hearthrug, "and when he went away I was left alone, for he seemed to have taken father with him." She pointed to the two chairs, adding: "Father won't come downstairs for some time, and when he does I shall have to watch him, knowing that at any moment he may be snatched from me." She leant forward, holding up her hand. "Don't tell me to hope for the best. Mr. Tisdale said that. As if I shouldn't! But in my heart I know that the old life is over. Our long walks"—she looked at the map—"are only memories; and from now on I shall never hear his voice without thinking of the time that is coming," she shivered, "when I shall not hear it."

"That time may not come for many years."

"Of course, I shall try to think so; but Mr. Tisdale made it plain that the disease is organic: quite incurable. I sent for you because you are a friend; because I had to speak. The aunts will call to-day. I shall be told: 'Your dear father will be better soon.' Can't you hear them? And I shall have to

reply : ' Yes, Aunt Priscilla ; yes, Aunt Lavinia, ' when I'm wild with misery. Have you ever known what it is to be cut in two, and to know that one part, the best part, is going to be taken away ?'

" My mother died when I was a baby," Hugo replied, " and my father was not very unlike Sir Giles Mottisfont."

" Uncle Giles is responsible for all this misery," she said fiercely. " I can't bear to go near him. I'm ashamed of being a Mottisfont. If anything happened to father I should never want to see any of them again. Do I shock you ?"

" No."

" Why can I speak out to you and to no one else ?"

Their eyes met. Then Hugo answered dully :

" You knew that you could rely on my sympathy ; you knew that I would understand. And if I could say anything——" He paused, as if some superlative effort on his part might evoke the right word. Then he added slowly : " You spoke of memories. Isn't that something ? Something which is yours for ever and ever ? I would give a great deal to have such memories. And if—if the worst should happen, thank God that you are able to look back upon years of happiness given to very few. If I were like you——"

He broke off abruptly. Joy had never taken

her eyes from his face. Now she rose and approached him.

"You have had trouble, too?"

"Yes."

"I knew it. That is why I wanted you; that is why you understand. I saw it in your face the first day we met."

"My trouble was different to yours. I lost something which might have been the real thing, and wasn't. And my memories are— Well, I keep them under lock and key."

She noticed that he didn't look at her, that his attitude conveyed an idea of detachment, of aloofness. Just then a bell tinkled. Joy rose.

"That's father. He wants me. Thank you again for coming. All the same, those who have lived in sunshine can hardly understand what life is without it."

"You will have plenty of sunshine yet."

"Not here, if he goes."

Hugo looked back when he reached the door. She was standing near the mantelpiece, following him with her eyes. Upon her face lay an expression, peculiarly sad and forlorn, as if she had asked for bread and received a stone. He told himself that he ought to have said more; that what he had said was platitudinous and unconvincing. Was it likely that a young woman would be content with memories, however fragrant? And who but the middle-aged and elderly could think

of sunshine when it was raining cats and dogs?

He walked back to the cottage, annoyed with himself and the sorry part he had played, and annoyed with Joy. He would have liked to have said, almost brutally: "You are one of the most fortunate young women I know. You have a lover who adores you, and who is exactly as he ought to be. If the present seems dark, think of the future!"

His last words had hinted at the future, but she had apparently not understood him. And yet, all the time she was speaking, and most particularly at the moment when she had seemed upon the ragged edge of collapse, he had been thinking: "She sent for me, but she wants Burgess. Burgess would take her in his arms and console her. She must be thinking of him, longing for him. I am a sort of absurd proxy. She would never have sent for me had Burgess been here."

Passing through Hernshaw Parva, he encountered the aunts. He was passing them by, lifting his hat, when Miss Priscilla stopped him with a gesture. Some three weeks before he had been introduced to the ladies, and in a subtle way had been given to understand that bearded strangers without proper credentials were to be kept at a distance.

Hugo noticed that the aunts were rather more carefully dressed than usual. Miss Lavinia carried a muff, with a knot of puce-

coloured ribbon; Miss Priscilla looked remarkably handsome in a grey cloth mantle, trimmed with chinchilla. Their pale, prominent eyes sparkled with excitement. Hugo realized that George Vennable's illness, as matter for endless discussion and advice, was not altogether unwelcome to the aunts. And, no matter what happened, they would assume in public, and in private, that optimism peculiar to the Mottisfont, the bland conviction of nothing being really amiss with anybody connected with them.

"We are on our way to the Rectory, not that we are alarmed," said Miss Priscilla, after formal salutations had been interchanged.

Miss Lavinia hastened to add: "Mr. Vennable has always enjoyed such excellent health. We heard that you were with him last night when his—er—indisposition occurred."

"I have come from there just now," Hugo replied. "You will be sorry to hear that Mr. Tisdale's report is not reassuring."

"If he would put himself into the hands of our own medical attendant, a man of years and experience. Some time ago, my sister's health distressed her very much"—Miss Lavinia's pink face grew red—"although I was quite convinced in my own mind that nothing serious was the matter. She complained of palpitation of the heart——"

"And attacks of giddiness."

"Due entirely to indigestion. She upset

herself and me—— Yes, you did indeed, Lavinia. But Dr. Snelgrove effected a radical cure with sixpennyworth of bicarbonate of soda. Since, we have never been without it."

"I have brought a small packet for Mr. Vennable," added Miss Lavinia.

"This is not a case for bicarbonate of soda. Mr. Vennable is suffering from valvular disease of the heart, which has become organic."

"Mr. Tisdale told you that?"

"Miss Vennable repeated to me what he had said."

"Oh!" The aunts looked down their aquiline noses; their long upper lips lengthened perceptibly. Then Miss Priscilla said tartly:

"We felt that our niece was assuming a grave responsibility when she turned her father's house into a hospital for a contagious disease."

"That was entirely Mr. Vennable's doing."

"Really?" Both ladies sniffed a well-bred incredulity. "Ah, it is like the dear man to say so. Sister, perhaps we ought to be moving on. We shall make light of this—er—indisposition for poor Joy's sake."

They bowed formally. Suddenly Hugo experienced a burning desire to upset their smug little apple-cart.

"If Mr. Vennable should not recover——"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia.

Miss Priscilla drew herself up with a certain complacency. From the first she had been

quite sure that Mr. Charters was not a member of a county family. A question like this from a stranger indicated distressing ignorance of the usages of good society.

"In such an event," she replied austerely, "an event I would prefer not to discuss, Miss Vennable, no doubt, would be made the object of *our* particular care. Good-bye, Mr. Charters."

"Good - bye," said Hugo. "If I might venture to make a suggestion, don't speak lightly of this seizure"—he emphasised the word grimly—"as an indisposition, for it's unhappily nothing of the sort."

He went on, leaving the ladies open-mouthed with astonishment.

What they had said, however, concerning Joy's future provided him with food for reflection. As an object of particular care upon the part of the aunts, Joy would be miserable. Of course, she was going to marry Burgess, but—if she didn't? He had a dreadful vision of her, caged, growing old in captivity, and mute; for she would never sing her father's songs to the aunts. Would she have courage to fly away from her beloved Forest? Would she be the same Joy elsewhere?

CHAPTER XVI

WITHIN a few days the parson was downstairs again. Tisdale and Hugo were the only persons to perceive that the outward signs of the lesion were visible on Joy's face rather than his.

"She ought to have a change," said Hugo.

"My dear fellow, that is quite impossible. Who would look after the parson?"

"I might."

It was characteristic of Tisdale that he accepted suggestions, even as the immortal Pooh Bah accepted bribes, from any hands, however humble; and always he acted when men of years and experience might be taking matters under consideration. Now he said abruptly:

"Do you mean that?"

And Hugo answered as curtly:

"Of course I do."

"Then I shall do my best to arrange it."

"She ought to have a jolly fortnight in town."

"Yes, yes! Mrs. Giles Mottisfont will be delighted to give her a good time."

Hugo found himself wincing at the lady's name. He wondered if she, who had been Mollie Savernake, would recognise him if they happened to meet. Fortunately, young Mrs. Giles detested the Forest, and considered that she had done her duty handsomely, inasmuch as she always came to the Park for the big shoot and for the Hunt Ball at Easter.

Hugo knew that Joy would see Esmé Burgess at her house ; and now that the young fellow's future was so brilliantly assured, he would not lose five minutes in asking her to become his wife. She would return to Hernshaw radiant with health and happiness.

Eventually the first part of this programme was arranged although not without protest on Joy's part. Indeed, it is doubtful whether she would have left her father, had it not become perfectly plain that the dear man was taking her refusal to enjoy a holiday very seriously to heart, and thereby imperilling his own health.

Upon the eve of Joy's departure, Hugo and the parson and she were sitting in the drawing-room at the Rectory, a room hardly ever used.

It was after seeing this room and making the acquaintance of the aunts that Hugo understood why the loss of George Vennable's ambitions had been a greater calamity than the loss of his wife. The parson had married during the late seventies, at a lamentable period in English art, when colours seemed to

be as hopelessly muddled and dull as the ideas of those in authority who insisted upon their general use.

"O Liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name!" Sage-greens, dingy yellows, dismal blues, abominable browns, became the fashion. All Mottisfont bow the knee to authority. To them what is, is right. Alicia Mottisfont, brought up in a delightful house, filled with charming furniture, insisted upon what she called high art decoration. George Vennable shrugged his shoulders and laughed. The drawing-room was his wife's affair, not his. She had to live in it, not he. She did live in it; and Philistines hinted afterwards that the fact accounted for her premature decease.

According to Mr. Babbat and many others, colours are intimately correlated with the action of the human mind. It is certain that George Vennable's drawing-room unduly depressed both him and his daughter, and on that account he rarely sat in it. Also, the atrabiliary scheme of decoration, the ebonised furniture, with absurd and impossible birds and flowers hand-painted upon a gold background, seemed to be designed expressly to provoke absurd and impossible discussions. Mrs. Vennable liked the sound of her own voice as well as any Mottisfont that ever lived, but the parson from the beginning had refused to sing duets with her. For the sake of peace,

he had held his tongue. More, realizing the fatuity of attempting to prove her to be in the wrong, he had philosophically allowed her to believe herself to be always in the right.

The three had finished their game of cut-throat bridge, and were sitting in front of the fire. A dado, the colour of the Liffey, with yellow flamingoes upon it, inspired the parson, normally the most courteous and chivalrous of men, to say with brutal unexpectedness :

"Most women cheat at bridge."

Joy "rose" instantly, and the parson had to explain, admitting that the frauds were perpetrated subconsciously for the most part. Here the talk would have flowed into easier channels had it not been for the frieze, which, designed by a late Royal Academician, who ought to have been a prize-fighter, not only hit the beholder in the eye, but seemed to expect to be hit back. Joy said, with heightened colour :

"Why do men consider cheating at cards the unpardonable sin?"

"Do they?" asked the parson mildly.

"You know they do, father. A man who cheats at cards has to leave his clubs, hasn't he?"

She looked at Hugo, who nodded his head, thinking that this was Joy's last evening. Within a few hours she would be laughing and joking with Esmé Burgess, instead of discussing unprofitable and irritating themes.

"But other things, worse things, can be done with impunity."

To this second challenge Hugo nodded again, which was unwise, if he wished to silence the young lady, for she at once leapt to the unwarrantable conclusion that he disagreed with her. Then, without any further warning, she said, with a certain defiance:

"There was that Charteris case. I'm so glad you spell your name differently."

Hugo felt hot, and wondered if his cheeks displayed a warmer colour than usual. Joy continued in the same slightly hard tone:

"Did Mr. Hugo Charteris have to leave his clubs?"

"Hugo Charteris?" repeated the parson. "Yes, yes, to be sure; one of the Saffron Charteris lot. A sad story, that."

"Did he have to leave his clubs?" persisted Joy.

"Of course not," muttered Hugo.

"And why not?" continued Joy vehemently. She looked in turn at each of the men. "You think I'm a baby to ask such a question. Well, I know, of course, that he did not leave his clubs. A man can rob an old friend of his wife, can break up a home, in which he has been treated for years as an honoured guest, and no fellow-man thinks much the worse of him."

"My dear!" protested the parson.

"Father, you know that I'm not speaking

of you, or you"—she turned to Hugo, with a faint smile—"but of the average man, who reflects, more or less faithfully, public opinion. He condones an unspeakable offence by allowing the offender to associate with him; but a boy who cheats at cards is kicked out, and ruined for life."

"It's a difficult subject," said the parson, "and the cases are different."

"They are, indeed," Joy replied; "and, to my mind, one is ten thousand times worse than the other. I could forgive a poor wretch who cheated at cards, but I should cut Mr. Hugo Charteris dead if I had the dishonour of knowing him."

George Vennable made no reply. In the glow of the fire Joy had assumed something of her mother's look. Alicia had often railed against sinners whom she had never met, and against sins she herself was incapable of committing.

"You read that case?" said Hugo, in a low voice.

"Every word of it. It happens to be a subject on which I feel very strongly."

"It interested me," said the parson meditatively. "My memory is not quite clear, but it struck me at the time that the defendant might not have been as black as was made out. He held his peace. Weil," he chuckled, "I, too, have held my peace; and a good many of your relations, my dear, have assumed that,

because I said nothing, there was nothing to say."

"Did you read that case?" said Joy to Hugo.

"Yes; I was as interested as anybody else."

"And what opinion did you come to? I'm sure you felt as I feel about it. For instance, you would have hated to take his hand?"

"I can't see myself taking his hand."

"I knew it."

All the harshness went out of her eyes, which beamed upon him. She was wearing a simple evening dress of soft white silk, which, although well cut, might have looked shabby in a stronger light. On her right hand sparkled an old-fashioned diamond ring that had belonged to her mother. At rest, and almost motionless in her low chair, she looked intensely alive. Her vitality sparkled like the good Brazilian stones in their tarnished silver setting.

Then, as Hugo's eyes met hers in a glance she was unable to interpret, she showed a deeper tinge of colour in her cheek and smiled. Hugo wanted to say: "I'm the man you would like to cut dead. Cut me! Kick me out of this house! Let's have it over and done with!" Instead, he laughed, smitten by the topsy-turvydom of the situation. Something in his laugh surprised and puzzled Joy, as well it might, for it broke a link between them.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I was wondering what would happen if you met this man."

"I may meet him," said Joy. "Mollie Mottisfont knows him; she told me so. She said he was charming. And she added, I remember, that after he had married Mrs. Tempest the world would forgive them both, because they were so agreeable and so rich. If I do meet him——"

"Well?"

She hesitated. The parson had fallen asleep, dozing off, with his pleasant smile on his lips. Not wishing to wake him, Joy answered in a whisper:

"I suppose Mrs. Giles's drawing-room is large enough to hold him and me for a minute or two? I should escape at the first opportunity."

Next day she left Hernshaw. Hugo told himself that if he had spoken out she would have lost a much-needed holiday. Thus he salved a conscience already more sensitive than he would have cared to admit. For it was plain to him that, unwittingly, he had obtained her friendship under false pretences. The glance of her eye, the pressure of her hand when she bade him good-bye, were eloquent of something more than gratitude.

From the hour she left he missed her horribly. The Forest of Ys lost its subtle enchantment. The very air became heavy and dank, as if

a blight had invaded it. An unconquerable depression attacked him. Not being of a temperament which indulges itself with introspection and self-analysis, he was unable to assign a true cause for this fit of the blues, as he termed it, other than the indubitable fact that the wind was keenly in the east. Two facts obsessed his intelligence and perceptive faculties: Joy loved and was beloved by Esmé Burgess; and he had pledged himself to return to Angela within a definite time.

A letter from Joy, the first she had written to him, did not clear the skies. She was in a whirl of gaiety—dancing, play-going, dining-out, and shopping. She wrote, as she spoke, with a simple directness of phrase, which brought her vividly to mind. At the end of the letter she mentioned Burgess.

"Esmé is quite a celebrity, but not a bit spoiled. He met me at Waterloo, and has cancelled at least half a dozen engagements on my account. He seems to be much stronger and *older*. Perhaps I rather miss the boy. . . ."

Hugo stared at the letter, frowning and pulling at his moustache. Burgess, of course, must be suffering from an inevitably swelled head. Joy would not admit as much, naturally. Perhaps she was disappointed. A moment later he was amazed at himself for having experienced a curious sense of satisfaction. Later, he divined that at this particular moment light had been vouchsafed him, only, unhappily, he shut

his eyes to it. Joy, he argued, accustomed to dominate her lover, was beginning to find out that it was his turn to dominate her. In a world infinitely larger than *Hernshaw Magna*, Burgess had been acclaimed as a superior person.

For the rest of the day he tried, not very successfully, to purge his mind of an ever-increasing envy. The twenty-four hours that followed were humiliating. Burgess forced upon him those comparisons which hitherto he had deliberately ignored. Hugo's opportunities had been greater than those of the son of an obscure journalist. At last he saw them clearly, even as a captain might see the wreckage of a gallant ship strewn upon some treacherous shore, knowing, with heartrending conviction, that irreparable disaster might have been avoided so easily.

To her father Joy wrote at greater length and with less reserve. George Vennable handed the letter to Hugo at breakfast.

"Esmé is wonderful. Mollie, who is rather hypercritical, says he may be Prime Minister some day. You can imagine how I feel, because I always knew that the right stuff was there; and now to realise that my faith is justified! I have heard him speak. The audience were completely carried away. I found myself wondering that I had ever dared to chaff him; but afterwards, when he was alone with me, I began chaffing him again. It is as if the boy

we knew so well was possessed with some extraordinary spirit when he addresses the public . . ."

At the end of the letter Joy mentioned, incidentally, that she was returning to Hershaw in the company of Mrs. Giles Mottisfont. The fact that the lady who had been Mollie Savernake might meet him and recognise him was not a source of disturbance, because Hugo had made up his mind to speak the whole truth to Joy herself.

Upon the morning of the day when Joy was expected, Hugo moved back to Jordan Cottage. Mrs. Owbridge met him, waving a telegram. Burgess, it seemed, was accompanying the ladies. The inference was unmistakable. Burgess was returning as Joy's affianced husband. Mrs. Owbridge hinted as much, with a sly look out of her shrewd eyes at Hugo, wondering how he would take this portentous piece of news. Hugo said calmly :

"I suppose we shall have a wedding soon, Mrs. Owbridge?"

"The sooner the better, say I, sir, after a young lady has passed one-and-twenty. There's not enough men to go round, and the best and prettiest ought to take a 'usband when they can get 'im. A single life is very monotonous."

Hugo went for a long walk in the Forest.

When he returned Burgess was smoking in

the snug sitting-room. Hugo held out his hand with a questioning smile. The young fellow looked extraordinarily well and handsome, having gained a more assured bearing; and with it, as Joy had said, a look of maturity. Nevertheless, he burst into an account of himself and his doings without answering the questioning smile, and without any reference to Joy. His star, he had always believed in his star, was in the ascendant. He had found backers: men with enthusiasm and money.

Only men?

The women, he answered with a slight flush, had been very kind. The "New Brooms" had identified themselves with the women. He began to speak of the part women might play in a regenerated England. This sort of talk bored Hugo, but he listened attentively, with an ear strained to catch the personal note. Fluently as Burgess talked, the elder man was sensible of the speaker's innocence, of a suppressed passion and excitement. "He doesn't care a hang for women," reflected Hugo, "but he is in hot pursuit of one."

They dined together. Burgess said that Joy had asked him to stop at the Rectory. Having mentioned this, he became rather silent, as if willing to let Hugo draw certain deductions. But as soon as Mrs. Owbridge had cleared away he plunged into confession.

"I've come down here to ask her to marry me. I couldn't do it in London. Didn't have a

chance! You look incredulous. Well, perhaps I funked it. Perhaps I wanted the right setting. We are going to have a game of golf tomorrow."

"You're the luckiest man in all the world."

"I've said that to myself again and again. I don't want to babble, but she was as dear and sweet in London as—— Look here, it really is an idyll. I never cared for any other girl, and she—— Well, I don't think she felt her pulses beat faster for any man. I was obliged for your warning; but Tisdale—— Poor old Tisdale, a capital fellow! Joy always liked him, and respected him. . . ."

The lover raved on, weaving fancies light as the tobacco smoke that floated above his head. Ideals and enthusiasms flared, revealing an ignorance and an inexperience of women that at any other time might have provoked smiles from a man of the world. Hugo smoked his pipe. Again and again he told himself that this was the real thing, admittedly so rare, and no more to be confounded with the sexual attraction of man for maid than the loves of the angels with the matings of animals. The greater thing, the supreme spiritual affinity, included the physical one, of course, purging it of all grossness; and so amazing, so transcendent, is the power of the spirit over the flesh that this glowing, radiant youth was able to transport his listener to that empyrean wherein he seemed to float so serenely.

Finally the men went to bed, but Hugo, within half an hour, had occasion to speak to Burgess. He found the hope of the "New Brooms" fast asleep and smiling. Hugo did not wake him, but watched him for more than a minute, wondering if Joy were also asleep and dreaming of her lover.

The beauty of the face in repose moved him profoundly. He found himself wondering what it would feel like to have such a son. He had never been sensible of a paternal emotion before. It exorcised the demon of jealousy, substituting a vague sadness entirely impersonal, because he remembered that Burgess's mother was dead. She had adored him. How unwillingly she must have left him! And more than once the young fellow had spoken of an inspiring influence from without: some kindly guardian angel, so to speak, who quite unexpectedly seemed to place winged words in his mouth, or to guide his pen.

Hugo returned to his room to pass a wretched night. "Fateful shadows," his own acts, hovered about his bed. He wandered with them up and down those slums of sleep where oblivion seems so inaccessibly near, the much-sought happiness just beyond our reach. He had always done what he pleased; but the man who does what he pleases is seldom pleased with what he does.

CHAPTER XVII

HUGO went shooting the next day. January was drawing to a close, and with it the shooting season. To an observing eye the first signs of spring were beginning to show themselves; almost imperceptible gradations of warmer tint might be seen upon the willows. Tom Henbest trudged beside his master, but generally just out of sight, being a true descendant of a race of poachers and smugglers, with an inherited instinct to place a bush or a tree between himself and the quality. The honest fellow had only one weakness—strong ale; and if he tiddled too often, it must not be forgotten that a slatternly, ill-tempered wife, with a tongue like a file, was always awaiting him when he returned to his tiny cottage after a long day's work. In moments of exhilaration Tom admitted that it was "a tarr'ble job to keep his hands off she!" But apparently he had done so, submitting patiently to everlasting tantrums. Two of the children were ailing. Tisdale had told Hugo, about the time of the outbreak of diphtheria, how tenaciously the humbler Foresters clung to certain nostrums.

Mrs. Henbest believed that virtue lay in acorns and a paste of raw flour and water. The effect of this upon an anæmic, dyspeptic girl of sixteen might well have undermined faith in such remedies; but Mrs. Henbest went on collecting mast, and administered her paste as regularly as Mrs. Squeers served out brimstone and treacle to the urchins of Dotheboys Hall.

Hugo found his mind dwelling upon the Henbests (and what they represented: so many cubic yards of ignorance and misery) and the lovers, now engaged to play at a game even more serious than golf. Spring sparkled in their veins too. A hole upon the golf-course had been aptly named Sunny Bushes. When the sun shone—and it was shining to-day—one could always find a warm bank which invited the weary golfer to sit down and smoke a cigarette, meditating awhile upon the triumphs and disappointments of the round. Hugo was ready to lay long odds that Burgess would select this sheltered spot for the declaration of his passion. From it might be obtained a view of a delectable landscape, panoramic in extent, stretching on and on till it melted and vanished in the distant sea. The future life of the lovers presented quite as enchanting a prospect.

Plunging through a snipe bog, in which the snipe were absent, up to his ankles in black, evil-smelling mud, with the ever-increasing

chance of floundering deeper and deeper, Tom Henbest symbolised the reverse of life's medal.

The sport was so bad that Hugo returned home early in the afternoon. He went at once to his room to change. But he had hardly closed the door before Burgess burst in, wild with misery.

He had made an appalling mistake!

The wise reader will have anticipated this. We shall not, therefore, dwell upon the obvious cause, but proceed at once to the less obvious effect. Joy's love for the young fellow had been essentially a maternal sentiment; it might, or it might not, remain such to the end.

The tale of disaster confounded Hugo, because he had been as confident as the youth that the primrose path led straight and shining to the altar. Could Tisdale—

Tisdale? Burgess exploded. Tisdale was no more to be considered than Tommy Bungay or Jimmie Pundle: callow youths with absolutely nothing in their nice-looking pates but the determination to hunt six days a week, by Jove! and stroll over to the kennels on Sunday afternoon and have a squint at the hounds. And any fellow with an ounce of intelligence could take his oath that Joy Vennable would never fall in love with a Bungay.

When he had proved this to his own satisfaction, Burgess paused. Hugo put the question

directly: Why did Burgess assume so violently that he had been supplanted? With a certain embarrassment confession was made. The furious youth had extracted, perhaps with brutality, the unqualified admission. Hope had been denied to him categorically, because there was another.

At this point Burgess broke down. It has been said that he was not effeminate, but the feminism in his character and temperament had been manifested to Hugo within an hour of their first meeting. Once before Charteris had been confronted with a similar emergency. Poor young Tressilian had eaten his leek with tears which Hugo had tried to stanch with words abominably trite and unavailing. Tressilian's passion, it is true, had been of a scarlet complexion, tainted from the first. This other was the pure white flame.

Hugo waited. Something in his silence may have calmed Burgess, for presently he said:

"What has happened while I've been away? You must know whom she's met in the last two months; what outsider, I mean."

"She has met nobody; not a soul."

There was a long pause. Burgess stared steadily into eyes that met his as steadily. And then illumination came with blinding glare.

"By God, you're the man!"

Conviction is a state of mind difficult to resolve into its elements. Often it is of the

slowest growth: a mere accretion of innumerable layers. This may be termed conviction from within: the result of time and experience. Conviction from without (so stunning in its effects) may wipe out and obliterate the other. Hugo, for instance, who could have given a score of reasons for his belief that Joy loved Burgess, knew instantly that his reasoning had been founded upon a false premise. Joy's voice, which had trembled when she said, "I should go wild with misery if anything happened to him," still echoed in his ears. He could see her eyes suffused with emotion, and her fingers curved by fear. And, like a flash, he remembered that so she had spoken and looked when her father fell ill.

"I? Impossible!"

Hugo answered swiftly, knowing that the seemingly impossible had come to pass. Perhaps for the moment he was dominated by that personal magnetism which made Burgess a force as a public speaker. The thrill in the young man's voice, the note of inevitableness, the sense that this thing had happened in obedience to some strange and inexplicable law, the irony of the situation, were irresistible. But Hugo repeated the word: "Impossible!"

"And you told me you were engaged to be married?"

"That is true."

The men looked at each other again.

"I can't believe that Joy would have cared for any man unless he had shown plainly that he cared for her. Still——"

"Thank you, even for the doubt. If this is true——"

"I know it's true. There is an instinct greater than reason itself. Why shouldn't it be true? I was an idiot to leave you with her. But you behaved as if you wished to avoid all women."

"I did."

"And she kept out of your way. But that epidemic—— It's clear enough now. You played the hero. I heard of that. And the intimacy grew and grew, while I was jabbering away in my fool's paradise."

"If it is true," repeated Hugo, "I swear that I never suspected it. I would have staked my life that you had all her heart."

"It is yours—yours! And what are you going to do?"

"You needn't worry. I have only to tell her who I am."

Then he established his identity with Hugo Charteris, to the amazement and stupefaction of the other. He concluded with: "Tisdale knows. He forbade me to make a scene."

Burgess nodded, trying to reconcile fact and fancy. His quick brain apprehended that circumstance, not cowardice, nor any ignoble reason, had kept Hugo silent. He said, with

real feeling: "This is going to be an awful shock for poor Joy."

Never had Hugo liked him so well. His first thought had been for her.

"The sooner I see her the better," said Hugo. "I shall walk up to the Rectory at once."

"She'll forgive you," said Burgess, with a sigh.

"Never," replied Hugo, with grim emphasis; "because she won't forgive herself."

Within half an hour he was on his way to Hernshaw Magna. Alone, and in the fresh air, he underwent a violent physical reaction.

If Joy loved him——

That possibility blotted out Burgess and Angela. He started, hearing a strident laugh, hardly recognisable as his own, for at last he knew what, with his experience, he ought to have known before: he adored her. From the first she had captivated him, the white witch. And if that other sorceress had changed him with Circean spells from a man into the unclean beast, this sweet creature, with enchantments as potent—but how immeasurably different!—had restored his manhood. Thanks to her he stood upright again.

Unconsciously he quickened his pace. No woman had ever stirred him like this. If she loved him? He repeated the phrase again and again, till it bit like acid into his brain, deadening every tissue it touched, shrivelling up honour and conscience. He was in the relent-

less grip of a tremendous temptation : the greatest he had as yet encountered, and the most insidious, attacked with diabolical subtlety at the very moment when he was glorying in his strength.

If she loved him, and if he held her in his arms, would she not forgive him? Could she, a passionate creature—he had never doubted that—impose terms after an unconditional surrender?

He stood still, trembling. The sense that he could see clearly at such a moment was a fact of significance, because Joy herself had made such clarity of vision possible. She had uplifted him. In her company he had scaled peaks which soared above blurring mists. And the air in these altitudes was the very breath of her nostrils. If he pulled her down to the plains, she, the spirit and soul of her, would perish. She would become his, but nothing else.

Was that enough?

The base half of him roared "Yes!"

Civil war raged. Decisive battles in the world's history have been won and lost in a few minutes; the battles of the soul are sometimes of shorter duration. In this case the victory was to the powers of evil, because the human will, and the human appreciation of higher things, are bond-slaves to habit. During the past few weeks Hugo Charteris had lived, cheerfully enough, for others. A capacity for

self-sacrifice had been born in him, an inheritance from his mother, an almost ineradicable part of his character and temperament. Always it had stood out finely, distinguishing him from the common herd.

Never had it manifested itself so plainly as during the trial, although not half a dozen persons perceived it at the time. But overlying this divine quality were years of self-indulgence : years when he had obeyed no law other than the whim and inclination of the moment. Often he had revered the better, and then chosen the worse. At the supreme moment, when Angela had beguiled him into a blacker and more shameful sin than any he had committed heretofore, he knew what he was doing and did it, because the flesh was mightier than the spirit. Fanatics practising absurd mortifications excite pity and contempt, but they grasp one fundamental truth, which seems to elude this generation : no compromise is possible between the conflicting claims of body and soul. Some would seem to be all animal ; and in living like animals, recognising no law higher than the gratification of appetite, these may be serving some mysterious purpose hidden from finite understanding ; others—one recalls one or two shining examples—would seem to be all spirit, so far exalted above their fellows, so immune from earthly taint and temptation, that they, too, must be considered not quite human : beings placed among us to diffuse a

celestial radiance, chosen messengers of the Most High. Between these extreme types, we other mortals wander : now saints for a moment, now sinners for weary spaces of time. But is there one who, were he offered the choice, would elect to be sinner rather than saint ? Is there a man who sincerely believes that the cloying satisfaction of the flesh is a greater thing than the everlasting happiness of the spirit ?

Hugo paused after passing through the gate which gives access to the Rectory garden. The moon illuminated the modest façade of the house ; shafts of silvery light penetrated the row of fine beech-trees skirting the lawn ; in the air was the nip and filip of approaching frost. Hugo stared at the dormer-window projecting from the thatched roof : the window of Joy's bedroom, whence she had looked out upon the only world she knew. Every object here had been familiar to her since childhood, and each, in its degree, a formative influence in her life. To the left, heavily outlined against the northern sky, stood the church, in itself an extraordinary jumble of styles, a veritable page out of ecclesiastical history, with its thirteenth-century tower, fifteenth-century chancel, and a preposterous eighteenth-century nave, filled with high pews, and above these a wonderful three-decker pulpit.

In Joy's simple life this church loomed large. In it she had been baptised and confirmed ; upon its altar, each Sunday, she placed flowers.

To her the three-decker pulpit was sacrosanct, because from it the Word had emanated for a hundred and fifty years. She had been angry with Hugo for suggesting that such an abomination should be pulled down. A Mottisfont in this, as in many other things, she glorified any object of familiar use. When Mrs. Giles Mottisfont offered to present a brass lectern, the whole family had protested.

A trim parlourmaid greeted Hugo with a smile. Miss Vennable was at home, but the Rector had gone upstairs to take a nap before dinner. These homely details flowed fluently from the girl's lips. Obviously she regarded Hugo as a friend of the family, and likely, no doubt, to become a son of the house. What had escaped the eyes of the protagonists was plain as print to this village maiden. Nor did she usher him into the formal drawing-room, but led the way to the cosy dining-room.

Joy was talking to a lady, who sat with her back to the light, when Hugo's name was announced. Joy rose at once and held out her hand.

"I *am* glad to see you," she said, in the tone of delightful intimacy which indicates that one steadfast friend is speaking to another. This tone she had used ever since his first visit to the Rectory. Then, as he took her hand and pressed it, she lowered her candid eyes, and the blood flew to her cheeks. It was the most natural thing in the world that he should call,

but she was wondering what Burgess had told him. From the moment when she had confessed that there was another, she had realised, with shame, that the other might hear of it and draw humiliating inferences. Fortunately, her blushes were obscured by the pink light from the shaded lamp. She turned to the lady sitting behind her.

"Mollie, you have heard me speak of Mr. Charters?"

Hugo felt his heart bound. Why had he run this reckless and stupid risk? He had known that Mrs. Giles Mottisfont was at the Park, and had ignored the probability of meeting her at the Rectory.

She held out her hand. Hugo had to come forward, and, doing so, such light as there was fell full upon his face. He perceived that Mrs. Giles identified him. Her eyes sparkled; her lips closed; her fingers, just touching his, chilled him through her gloves. Then he heard Joy's voice, soft and clear:

"Father says you've been an angel to him."

He muttered something inarticulate. Mrs. Giles rose.

"I must be off," she declared. "Good-bye, dear." She kissed Joy twice, with a warmth which rather surprised the girl. "Come to me as soon as you can."

Hugo moved to the door, opening it as Mrs. Giles approached with a slow, gliding motion. He thought of her as a snake about to strike.

Their eyes met: defiance in his, in hers inflexible resolution.

"Miss Vennable has talked a great deal about you, Mr. Charteris, but she forgot to mention that your Christian name is Hugo. Had she done so, I could have told her that I knew you quite well."

She bowed formally, and passed out. Hugo heard the swish of her silk skirt as she crossed the hall. She had struck swiftly and surely.

Convention twisted his lips into a smile, because she might look back. She did not. Conscious of having done the right thing at the right moment, Mrs. Giles was too well bred a woman to exhibit triumph. She was sorry for Joy, but she counted Hugo the meanest man in the kingdom, for her cousin had, indeed, talked too much about Mr. Reginald Charters.

He closed the door, and came back into the middle of the room. Joy was looking at him with a glance so wistful, so pure, so trusting, that the evil in him withered as if touched by some white flame. The incredible had happened — she had heard and had not believed.

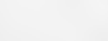
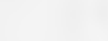
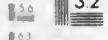
"Is Mollie quite mad?" she said, in a low voice.

Standing before him, her youth, the freshness of her, the virginal sweetness, the delicate rose-and-pearl colouring, impressed themselves upon his brain and heart. She might have



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been his—had he been worthy. Gazing at her, he noted a slight change, slight inasmuch as it was concerned with outward things, her dress, her bearing. London had put its hallmark on her. He divined, somehow, that this pretty frock had been bought for him. Her hair, with its softness as of spun silk, was arranged more carefully, more in accordance with the prevailing mode. He gazed at her hungrily, as a man gazes at some dear, sweet country whose shores are fading from his sight.

The silence became atrocious.

A lump in his throat prevented speech; her face changed. Indignation was rising, white and frothing, as boiling milk; the soft curves of her figure became rigid, almost angular; the eyes began to sparkle coldly, like stars on a frosty night.

"Have you nothing to say?" she asked.

"It is true. I am Hugo Charteris."

"Oh!"

The exclamation sobbed from her throat: a wail of anguish, the pitiful cry of a mortally wounded creature. It told him that he had slain something which could never live again: that blithe, joyous faith in her power to recognise and acclaim good as something immeasurably apart from evil. Henceforward good and evil would overlap. She would view all things and persons with blurred, doubting eyes.

"I love you," he stammered. "I love you,

do you understand? I am yours. I never belonged to anyone else."

"You belong to Mrs. Tempest."

There was no interrogation in her tone. She spoke disdainfully, and with absolute conviction, a conviction not to be undermined by any words, however specious. But as she spoke, she trembled, and this hardly perceptible sign of weakness provoked the primal man in him.

He made a step towards her.

She held up her hand with a gesture of extraordinary dignity, and instantly he stood still, realising her spiritual strength, realising also that she had fathomed his intention, and that this movement of violence, of savagery, had been the one thing wanting, the very touchstone to determine the distance between them. Her look, a look to haunt an honest man to the day of his death, seemed to say: "Heaven and hell are no farther apart than we are!"

Then, very slowly, she covered her face with her hands.

Hugo went out abashed, even as Gehazi left the presence of his master.

The Forest received him. For three hours he wandered on and on. Above, the moon looked down in chill contemplation, the eternal symbol of the light that reveals everything and warms nothing. Her beams shone

upon a world black and white, bereft of colour, movement, life. The familiar forms remained, grim wraiths, waiting patiently for the touch of rosy-fingered dawn.

Finally, he flung himself upon the heather. The wind blew keen from the high downs to the north-west; the ground was hard and frozen. But Hugo was unconscious of discomfort, for misery had reached the point when sensation is paralysed. He lay in the moonlight, knowing himself to be outcast from the only paradise he cared to enter, seeing clearly the might-have-been: a vision which leaves some indifferent, some passionately rebellious, some despairing, but none quite the same as before.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEXT day he left Hernshaw Parva. A few words of explanation passed between Burgess and himself. The young fellow looked the worse of the two.

"Mrs. Giles Mottisfont was there. She gave me away."

"Oh!"

Hugo could not go into details. And, purposely, he kept back what had followed Mrs. Mottisfont's departure.

"I shall bolt," he said heavily. "You'll bolt, too, eh? But, after a time, you'll come back. I wish you luck, Burgess. She's worth waiting for and fighting for."

Burgess raised rather a listless face.

"If she cares for you——"

"Damn it, man! I'm a leper in her eyes."

"I don't think I shall try again."

"Of course you will—again and again, if necessary."

For the first time he eyed the young fellow with a certain contempt.

"Where are you going, Charteris?"

"Out of England. I may shoot a woodcock or two in the Adriatic."

"And then? When that decree is made absolute, eh?"

Hugo hesitated.

"I suppose I shall marry Mrs. Tempest," he muttered.

"Ah! Well, when you marry her, I may try again."

They shook hands and parted.

Hugo returned to his London flat in May. Three months spent in cruising about the islands of the Adriatic had tanned his face and his sensibilities. Health and strength are astounding assets, and, unlike the great qualities of the mind, which may lie dormant under certain conditions, have a habit of asserting themselves. Hugo believed he was sound and sane because he could digest Cyprus beef and walk five-and-twenty miles in a day.

He came back to England to marry Angela Tempest. When he allowed his mind to dwell upon the future, which was seldom, he consoled himself with the reflection that so long as foxes ran fast, and pheasants flew high, he could kill time by killing them.

Pixton received him with a smile, which seemed to repeat itself upon the faces of the men at his club.

In Piccadilly one or two charming women, leaning out of their motors, waved welcoming fingers, indicating absolution. Evidently all was to be forgiven and forgotten.

Twice during the previous three months he

had written to Angela, telling her curtly where he was and what he was doing. In each case, knowing that he was on the move, she had replied by telegram. Upon arrival at his flat he had found another telegram.

"Am in Paris with Poppet. Cross tomorrow or day after."

Angela, of course, was buying "things," and therefore enjoying herself. Did it trouble her that within a fortnight Poppet would have to leave her? Perhaps. The child was a sweet creature, specially designed to adore and to be adored. And Poppet would take with her that dream of a cabinet, with panels painted and signed by Angelica Kauffman.

The same afternoon in Bond Street he came face to face with Lady Barnbogle. The august matron passed him by with exalted nose and averted eye, but on her austere lips flickered a smile not easy to interpret. Why did she smile? Possibly a vision of Angela playing ducks and drakes with twenty thousand a year had been vouchsafed to her. He wondered vaguely what had become of John. John might have taken to drink. That was just the sort of gross, stupid thing John would do. And Poppet would have to live with him. He tried to drive the child from his mind, and failed. She obsessed him: a tender, dainty little maid, with big, crystal-clear, innocent eyes, already beginning to ask questions, and alluring, fascinating manners. To

think of her alone in that huge Abbey with—John!

To get rid of this importunate Poppet he dined at his club with the swashbuckling ex-Major of Lancers, who, it will be remembered, had predicted that Hugo's pals would stand by him. The Major had been one of the first to greet the returning sinner. And, as before, in his loud, jolly voice, he had proposed a bird and a bottle of the best, a magnum, of course.

They dined at a small table in the big dining-room. Close by some young fellows were beginning a cheery evening by doing themselves "top hole." Everybody spoke to the Major, and he, you may be sure, had a word or a wink for each. The boys knew more about wine and tobacco than he did, but some of the older men were not too proud to ask for his advice in regard to these high matters, advice bestowed with fitting solemnity, and invariably approved by the wine-butler, a portly, well-matured individual, an understudy of the Major's.

After dinner, in the smoking-room, Hugo found himself surrounded by a group of red-faced roysterers, who, for reasons which they kept to themselves, chose to acclaim the wanderer as the hero of the hour.

"I told you they'd stand by you, my boy," whispered the Major. "One more tot of the Old Brown, and we'll nip off to the Levity. I wired for a couple of stalls."

Hugo sat with a smile on his face, now clean-shaven again, but through the ever-thickening clouds of tobacco-smoke he saw Poppet's delicate features and her large, interrogating eyes.

At the Levity, one of the most popular of the music-halls, Poppet, so to speak, sat on his knee, with her arm round his neck, strangling him. He couldn't get rid of the child. The entertainment was neither more nor less entertaining than usual. The great British public laughed and chattered and smoked while under-dressed women and over-dressed men shouted silly songs set to silly music. A so-called Venus displayed a figure that would have excited the derision of a Paris atelier in a series of *poses plastiques*. Then a Scotch comedian came on to the stage. Instantly a roar of applause burst from the crowded house, succeeded by silence, as the conductor waved his baton. Not a note, not a gesture, escaped the audience. Hugo whispered to the Major:

"They do know what is good when they see it. Why do they put up with what is so bad?"

The Major chuckled fatly.

"I like good wine, but I drink a lot of poor stuff, and the worst of it is that the poor stuff knocks us out."

After the entertainment, supper at one of the famous restaurants followed. Some genial

spirits followed them, prepared to "whoop her up" in Hugo's honour. A hundred years before these young bloods would have disturbed the peace by wrenching off door-knockers and bonneting watchmen. To-day they disturbed nothing other than their own digestions. Turned out of the restaurant by the scandalous Early Closing Act, the party went back to the club to smoke more cigars, drink whisky and Perrier, and tell yarns. This was the Major's golden hour. With a huge Perfecto in his mouth, and a long tumbler at his elbow, deep in a big armchair, the ex-Lancer would deliver an autobiographical sketch, full of incident, and nicely seasoned to the palate of his listeners. He seemed to have been everywhere, to have known everybody, and to have done everything. His capacity for enjoyment had increased rather than diminished with advancing years. It was colossal, Rabelaisian!

Towards the close of this memorable evening the Major described a kangaroo-hunt, with corroborative detail, due to a vivid and inflamed imagination rather than a memory admittedly the worse for wear. At the end of the narrative he said:

"Rather a rum thing happened next day. I ran across Wilverley. You boys don't remember 'Duffer' Wilverley. He was at Harrow with me, and went into the Rifle Brigade. Anazin' chap! A thunderin' cricketer,

and as clever as they make 'em. We called him the 'Duffer' because he was such a nailer at everything. Good-lookin', too—tall, fair cove, not very unlike you, Hugo, my boy. There wasn't a more popular fellow in London than the 'Duffer.' He brought off a queer double event: won the National on his own gee, and published a poem! I'm not a judge of poetry, but fellows in the know told me it was a bit of all right. Then he disappeared, dropped out entirely. Broke? Not a bit of it! He got what the Yankees call 'cold feet.' He told me about it over my camp-fire. He was fed up with this sort of thing;" and the Major waved an all-including arm.

"Call of the Wild?" suggested one of the company.

"That's it. So he cut loose. I found him on his own station, fit as a fiddle, and as happy as a tomtit. He told me solemnly that he was never coming back."

Half of the young men present said emphatically that they were damned. The Major muttered: "Stroanary thing—very!" and lit his fifth cigar.

Hugo returned to his flat late. Before he went to bed he looked at his mother's portrait. Again he found himself wondering, "Did she know?" Then he laughed, thinking of Wilverley. In the Adriatic, trying to masticate Cyprus beef, for instance, he had anticipated with pleasure this first night in town,

the plunge into the pleasures of the old life; and now he made the appalling discovery that it bored him to tears. The fun of Mayfair was no longer fun for him.

Why?

With a vague feeling of irritation he stared at his mother's picture. She conjured up a vision of Cynthia Charteris. Then, quite plainly, he saw Joy; and then at the last Joy melted from his sight, and the importunate Poppet held up her mouth to be kissed.

Angela did not reach London upon the following day. Hugo spent the morning in the Zoological Gardens, being a fellow of the Society and well known to several of the keepers. As a boy, nothing amused him more than to stand opposite some magnificent beast and select the exact spot where he would try to place a bullet if the animal were charging. Since those days he had shot some splendid specimens, and more than one had come within an inch or two of killing him. Recalling these escapes, he wondered grimly whether the fitter animal survived.

For a couple of hours he watched the restless creatures pacing up and down their ill-smelling dens. The Polar bears in particular challenged his pity. One monster reared up and blinked at Hugo with uncanny, reproachful eyes. "You know what we are accustomed to," he seemed to say. "Isn't this sort of thing

an outrage on your ridiculous civilisation?" The eagles stared at him fiercely. Of all the unfortunate prisoners, their lot appeared to be the most unhappy. Certainly it would be a kindness to fetch a gun and dispatch these lords of the air, condemned to sit for ever gazing into the sunlit spaces, where once they had held undisputed sway.

Hugo searched for a leopard presented by him to the Society. A keeper told him that it was dead.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Hugo cheerfully. "That's the best bit of news I've had to-day."

The man touched his hat, agape with astonishment.

"I'd like to kill 'em all," said Hugo, still smiling.

Again the keeper touched his hat, but as Hugo moved on he muttered:

"The bloodthirsty loonatic—reg'lar butcher!"

Hugo went home, sent in his resignation to the Society, and wrote a letter to the *Times*. In it he suggested that the public might study zoology from subjects stuffed and classified, as in the natural history museums. The Gardens, being an inferno worthy of the Dark Ages, ought to be put down by Act of Parliament. The dens might be kept for wife-beaters, vivisectionists, sweaters of cheap labour, and slum landlords. The one reason which justified the existence of the Gardens—to wit, its claim to be considered as a place of popular entertain-

ment—would justify also its metamorphosis into an open-air prison for the criminals named. The lower classes and the dear little ones would find it excruciatingly funny to throw bits of buns into the mouths of eminent surgeons; and no interfering keeper would rebuke 'Arriett for poking a confirmed wife-beater with the end of her umbrella.

When he had finished the letter, he read it through, laughed, and tore it up, recognising the fatuity of attacking British institutions.

During the afternoon he heard Esmé Burgess's name. Fortune had not behaved too kindly to Esmé in designing Joy Vennable to be a sister instead of a wife, but she was making amends in other ways. He had been triumphantly elected Member of Parliament for a constituency in Lancashire, where the voters are not easy to please. Burgess, it seemed, had captivated the rough miners and factory hands. After the declaration of the poll an extraordinary scene had taken place. Some of the lasses surrounded the successful candidate and insisted upon kissing him, thereby following the example of the young ladies overseas, who tried to make a star-spangled ass out of their national hero. Hugo thought of Burgess embraced against his will, turning a blushing cheek to these bold hussies. What irony! The one woman he wanted was in the Forest of Ys, and unwilling to leave it at his invitation.

He wondered whether Burgess had seen Joy, whether the old pleasant relations had been resumed. It would be easy to call upon Burgess, but incredibly difficult to speak of Joy.

Next day he found himself ascending to Angela's flat, where Angela was awaiting him. He hoped that Poppet would be present, to save the awkwardness of a first meeting. Angela, to do her justice, had a sense of the ridiculous and an unerring instinct for exits and entrances. She would not rush at him as those Lancashire lassies had rushed at poor Burgess. All the same, she might reasonably expect some exhibition of feeling, the right word, the understanding glance, the glad hand. His knees became as wax when he thought of these things.

Laus Deo!

Poppet was there, prettier than ever, and overjoyed to see her darling Uncle Hugo. In his overwhelming gratitude, he hugged her too hard.

"I knew you'd come back," she said. "Mummie said you wouldn't; but I knew you would, because you promised."

"Well, here I am," said Hugo, speaking and feeling like a clown in a pantomime. He had assumed a sort of reckless geniality, the broad grin with which the paladins of to-day face outrageous fortune.

With Poppet hanging round his neck, he held

out his hand to Angela, who had a blush upon her cheeks. Then she sat down.

"Begin at the beginning," said Angela.

He could see that she was excited, for the colour remained in her cheeks, and in her voice lurked an impatient, slightly petulant tone, often used in the old days when talking to John, but hardly ever to him. He found himself wondering whether she had met Mrs. Giles Mottisfont. Mrs. Giles would not hesitate to give him away, but she might be discreet for Joy's sake.

"I camped upon the banks of a river called Jordan. Ever heard of it, Poppet?"

"Course. Go on!"

"Abana and Pharpar—not to mention the Seine—may be finer rivers, but I preferred Jordan."

"What does he mean, mummie?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we shall find out presently."

"Upon the banks of the Jordan I lived the simple life."

"It seems to have agreed with you."

"Appearances are deceptive. You look remarkably well, Angela, but haven't you something on your mind?"

She frowned.

"Poppet!"

"Yes, mummie!"

"Now that you have seen Uncle Hugo, run off to nurse, darling."

"Oh, mummie!"

"At once, my pet!"

This was the voice of She-who-must-be-obeyed. Poppet disappeared in silence, with a tear on each cheek. The child had served a purpose, and was now summarily dismissed. As soon as the door had closed, Hugo said:

"You might have let her down easier."

She ignored this remark. When she spoke again, her tone was sweet as Hybla honey.

"Hugo, do you underrate my intelligence? Or have I overrated yours?"

The man looked at her steadily. The pink upon Angela's cheeks deepened; her eyes sparkled.

"Do you suppose for one instant that you have taken me in? Six months ago you showed me plainly that you were tired of me. Since then you have written two letters. Would you like to compare them with the letters of a year ago?"

Hugo gazed at her with a dim smile. Angela had this great gift of the gods. With a word, a glance, a gesture, she could convey the impression of being misunderstood, unhappy, and the victim of unreasoning injustice. Lady Barnbogle could have testified that, as a child, Angela always appeared to be in the right, when, as a matter of fact, she was indubitably in the wrong. Upon such occa-

sions she could, and did, assume an air of injured innocence, which made her mother and governess forget that they were Christian women.

The smile upon the man's face became less dim, for, suddenly, he realised how admirably she was got up for her part. She wore a sort of sublimated dressing-gown, a confection of lace, and tuile, and pale-blue baby ribbon. Innumerable little frills, dainty enough to have been fashioned by fairies, instead of overworked, under-paid seamstresses, foamed about her neck, her wrists, and the lower hem of her garment. If Aphrodite had considered the propriety of consulting Worth or Paquin before rising from the sea, she might have burst upon an adoring world in just such a frock as this. In it, with a suitable background and a nicely adjusted light from behind, she looked seventeen, a May blossom, a nymph of spring fresh from a bath of dew.

Hugo laughed.

It was disgraceful, unpardonable, even if we admit the provocation, perhaps the one exhibition of emotion for which Angela was unprepared. Lady Barnbogle had hurtled texts at her; John, the brute! had used language heard upon the tow-path; poor young Tressilian had blubbered.

"How dare you laugh?"

"I beg your pardon," said Hugo, "but you did overrate my intelligence. I ought to have

foreseen that you would find somebody else. Who is he?"

"I am going back to John. He loves me; he has been very kind. I have suffered horribly—please don't look so incredulous—and I have had to think of Poppet, darling little innocent! I have forgiven John. And he has forgiven me."

The phrases were spoken with odd intermittences of silence. Then Hugo said stupidly:

"You are going back to John!"

The thing was so obvious, so amazingly à propos, so simple, that he gasped. Then, pulling himself together, he said, with becoming gravity:

"From the bottom of my heart I congratulate both of you."

He stood up. Angela bit her lip; the blush became a flush. She seemed to lose the babyish, innocent expression. A woman of thirty said viciously, with a sharp intake of breath:

"I knew you were absolutely heartless."

"And an ass. What an ass I have been! Call me every name you can lay your tongue to!"

Instantly her eyes softened, for she saw that he was angry: a tribute she expected, and without which she would have been miserable. How angry he was she did not divine. His anger welled up slowly, with the natural forces, so long suppressed, behind it; and in front of

it, restraining it, the artificial forces which we call convention, good-breeding, and gentlemanly forbearance.

This thing had stood between him and happiness, this counterfeit presentment of a woman, this "rag and a hank of hair." How agreeable it would be to take her white neck between his hands, and, with inexorable gentleness, wring the life out of her! And then, afterwards, to put her into a cardboard box, lined with tissue-paper, with pink frills at the edge of it, and to tie it up with baby-ribbon and dispatch it, sealed and registered to—John! *Light pastry—This side up—With Care!*

"You are furious," she murmured, "and I thought you would be so glad."

She eyed him gratefully. For an awful moment she had feared that her power over men had ceased. Hugo felt his anger oozing from him. She was right. He ought to be glad; he was glad; she had severed his chains, enfranchised a slave. But, for the moment, he had not grasped this. Horror and rage possessed him, because at last he had recognised in her one of those terrible, inhuman, vampire-like monsters who, assuming the guise of fair women, lure men to their arms and destroy them.

He went slowly to the door.

As before, upon the threshold she called him back, unwilling that he should leave in anger, abhorring the thought that she was

losing irrevocably something she had once possessed.

"Hugo," she said piteously, "are you going without a word? I didn't mean to be cross. I have tried, indeed I have, to act for the best. And we have been so much to each other——" Her voice melted into a sob. Then she finished the phrase: "Nothing can wipe out that, can it?"

"Nothing," said Hugo grimly.

"Won't you take my hand, say good-bye kindly, and wish me well?"

"Is it possible that you ask me to take your hand?"

"How hard you are!"

He took her hand, regarding it curiously.

"Hard and heartless—eh? There was a time when this hand of yours held me and all I had in the hollow of it. Because of that, I do wish you well."

Something in his glance must have frightened her, for she lowered her eyes, and let him go without another word. With a faint sigh of relief, she reflected that if she had lost a friend she had not made an enemy.

Hugo hurried into the Park, and sat down upon a bench near the Serpentine. He was sensible that he had wished to kill a woman at the moment when she was doing him an unexpected and incalculable service. Why didn't he go down on his knees and thank her? The animosity died out of him. He blamed himself, not her. What glamour had she cast, what

sorceries had she used? Not till to-day had he seen her exactly as she was.

"There is one greater fool than I in England," he reflected, "and his name is John."

Then he remembered Lady Barnbogle's enigmatical smile.

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CHAPTER XIX

Hugo spent the rest of the month at Saffron Charteris. Cynthia poured sympathy into his wounds, and essayed the hocus-pocus trick of making the present so charming that the past is forgotten. They went about together, as they had done in the good old days, and around Cynthia's head the halo increased in size and radiance. Edward received him with the not altogether tactful remark, "You're the damnedest, luckiest man I know!" a reference to the escape from Circe; but later, about a week afterwards, when the brothers were going over the home farm, the elder said abruptly:

"You ought to settle down. If I were you I'd buy a nice place, with a goodish bit of land. I know of half a dozen that would suit you. And then Cynthia must find you a wife, the right sort, with no nonsense about her. Take my tip and leave it to Cynthia. I tell you languishing eyes and golden hair don't impose on her."

"You give sound advice, Edward."

"I told you six months ago you'd had a

peppering. Ask some sensible young woman to pick the shot out."

"Would she get much fun out of that?"

"Lord bless you—yes! They like it, the best of 'em, I mean. Not that rotten crowd you've been mixed up with."

"I might advertise: 'A reformed rake wants to make the acquaintance of a common or garden spade. Object, matrimony and the cultivation of English soil.'"

"Bar chaff, that's it. And you're fond of kids. You'd enjoy teaching a likely boy to ride and shoot."

Hugo looked hard into Edward's square, brown, woody countenance. Sincerity illuminated it with a pleasant light. If Hugo remained unmarried, his fortune would come back to an ancient house sadly in need of replenishing. Nobody knew better than Hugo how dear Saffron Charteris was to Edward. He loved his wife and his sons in that stodgy, undemonstrative fashion peculiar to many Englishmen; but his home, the cradle of his race, came first in his affections. Had he lost Cynthia, it is certain that he would have married again within a decent two years (not less), and, stepping in his father's tracks, would have chosen a wife with money, enough, at any rate, to put the land into first-class order, to rebuild a number of cottages, to pay off mortgages, and treble his county subscriptions. For Edward Charteris differed

from Sir Giles Mottisfont in this—he recognised his responsibilities as a landlord, although he may not have seen clearly the unformulated obligations due to a wife and children. Sir Giles sent his boys to Eton, which, indirectly, filled many small graves in the churchyard of Hernshaw Magna; Edward's sons, as has been said, were dispatched to a less expensive school.

"You're a good fellow, Edward," said Hugo, with feeling. "And I wish you were not such a stubborn, obstinate mule."

"Eh?"

"I've had a poppering, as you say, and to you I'll admit I'm sore, so sore that the gentlest hands in the world—Cynthia's—can't pick the shot out. They're in to stay. Enough of that. If you want to make things easier, let me write a cheque, enough to clear off the mortgage."

"No," said Edward, between his teeth.

At the evil word he winced. This mortgage on a fine property was his hair-shirt, to be worn next his skin till he died. Hugo did not press the point, divining that his brother's pride was adamantine, solid as the foundations of his house. And he knew that Cynthia would applaud this refusal to touch money that in a sense might be deemed not altogether without taint. The neighbours, if the mortgage were lifted with Hugo's money, would shake their heads knowingly, and whisper to each other

that this had been the price of recognition and whitewashing.

These same neighbours greeted the prodigal without the enthusiasm manifested at his club. Hugo could not escape from the conviction that he had ceased to be of them. Possibly the Suffolk squires and their dames expected an exhibition of sackcloth and ashes. Hugo's smiles were characterised by the vicar's wife as brazen.

All would have been forgotten and forgiven had he behaved with reasonable civility to the women. But he shunned them, not only because their prattle bored him, but for the hardly formulated reason that they belonged to the sex of Angela Tempest. Always he had taken women at their own valuation, never attempting to peer beneath the obscuring veil of pleasant looks and words. Now, to his dismay, he found himself cynically mistrustful of every specious sentiment. He sniffed, so to speak, at the very milk of human kindness, wondering whether it had turned sour. When he spoke of this to Cynthia, she laughed.

"The milk of human kindness is like all other milk—it absorbs odours, and you mustn't put a strong prejudice near it."

"I keep away on that account."

She laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"Dear Hugo, laugh with us, as you used to do, and not at us. We women have to pretend a little. And it is so lucky for you men that

we refuse to acknowledge that our dolls are stuffed with sawdust."

"You don't play with dolls still?"

"Oh yes, I do, thank Heaven! And"—her fingers tightened upon his arm—"the old dolls that are a bit battered are the ones I like best to play with."

"I see," said Hugo, with a deprecating smile. Then, with an entire change of voice and manner, he said almost savagely: "You can't go on playing with me, Cynthia, unless you put in new sawdust."

"That's what I should like to do."

"We won't talk about it, but one thing is certain—I shall never be a doll again. Perhaps marionette is a better word."

"We are all marionettes. And, if the right person pulls the string, we enjoy our dancing."

"Ah—the right person! Just so."

But immediately he changed the subject. Not even to Cynthia had he spoken of Joy Vennable. He would have liked to do so, and at interminable length, but he could not trust himself. Whenever an opportunity of confession presented itself he had a vision of Esmé Burgess and Tressilian sobbing their hearts out; a terrible and humiliating spectacle.

But he thought of Joy always.

Her name obsessed him. A pleasure-seeker, life without joy, that *joie de vivre* which had

distinguished him and made him so attractive to others, seemed drab and futile. Woe to those who discover, too late, what the true joy of the world is! Who see it, feel it, are intoxicated by its fragrance, and know that it has passed them by because they are unworthy and unclean.

During this month of May, every flower unveiling its tender petals to the sun, every bird and beast in the woods and fields, the shy, awkward couples: the Jacks and Jills of the village, walking with interlaced fingers, silent, stupid, but, for the moment, thrilling with an emotion they know to be greater and more mysterious than any other experience, these tormented Hugo with the Chinese torture of Ling: the infliction of a thousand cuts, none of them deep and kind enough to inflict death.

At the end of the month he went away. Cynthia said to her husband:

"He won't come back."

"Of course he will. I dare say he was a bit hipped. Nothing to shoot; but next autumn, with the show of birds we're likely to have! Lucky beggar, I call him."

"Edward! Can't you see that he's wretched?"

"Pooh! Never saw him looking fitter."

"That's the tragedy of it: to be so strong and young, with a constitution that may carry him on to eighty."

"My dear, time and a nice young woman will put things straight."

Edward spoke in his usual didactic tone, rather annoyed that his wife should exhibit signs of tears. Her eyes had been dry enough when he told her that they might have to let the shooting. She had not dropped a tear when an epidemic ravaged his flocks and herds.

"A nice young woman, yes; but perhaps a really nice young woman, who doesn't know what we know, might hesitate."

"Not she. You keep your eyes open."

"I always do," said Cynthia. To herself she reflected: "Not quite always."

For Hugo had gone out of her life, and she had blinded herself to the conviction that their lines in life must lie apart. She would remain where she was, surrounded by a moat which reflected faithfully every stone in the ancient house that she was proud to call her home. Hugo must set forth on his quest for happiness.

Travelling up to London, Hugo told himself that the visit had been a mistake. The quiet life exasperated him, and the grim spectre of poverty, which he was not allowed to expel with a cheque, haunted him. Deflated entirely of his usual optimism, he saw plainly the pinching effects of this never-ending struggle between ways and means. With advancing years Edward was growing more irritable, turning into the waxy paterfamilias: the terror

of his wife and sons. Cynthia was losing her charming look of youth.

Next day he ordered a pair of Purdey's best guns to be put in hand for Edward, and sent Cynthia a string of pearls, having discovered to his horror that she was wearing imitation ones, the original necklace having been sold to pay the eldest son's college bills. He plunged once more into the Mayfair whirlpool, but not in the company of the ex-Major of Lancers. Polo distracted him.

He was settling into a groove when Mr. and Mrs. John Tempest returned to their house in Grosvenor Square, much to the satisfaction of their tradespeople and an enormous circle of friends. Lady Barnbogle told everybody that dear John had behaved with extraordinary delicacy. A bishop testified solemnly concerning Angela's alms and oblations during the six months succeeding the decree, which was never made absolute. Poppet played a delightful part in the comedy, and delivered her lines with a freshness and spontaneity which precluded any possible suspicion of stage-management. At Saint Paul's, Knightsbridge, on Sunday morning, saints and sinners alike were invited to behold John and Angela, with Poppet between them, clothed in white, shining tissues—an angel child, as Canon Smoothbore observed to the Duchess of Wallop. And after Divine Service, an edifying parade in the Park followed. The

late worshippers, with nods and becks and wreathed smiles, whispered to each other that the great Galantine had been beguiled from the Spitz Hotel by John, and that poor Spitz was in bed on account of it, and never likely to be quite the same again.

Hugo met the three Tempests not a hundred yards from the Achilles statue, where the fashionable crowd happened to be thickest. Poppet exclaimed in a clear voice:

"There's darling Uncle Hugo."

John, purple in the face, grasped her. Hugo dodged behind a portly dowager. Angela said, without turning a hair:

"Why, so it is! I suppose we ought to be thinking of luncheon."

But Poppet was too young to be thinking of luncheon, and, being accustomed to having her own way with her father, protested shrilly and volubly.

"He promised me to come back; yes, he did, he did! And when he came mummie sent me out of the room, and I've never seen him since. Let me go, dad; I must give him a kiss. I——"

"Hold your tongue!" said John savagely.

Poppet, never spoken to in this tone, relapsed into tearful silence. Hugo escaped. The spectators smiled discreetly, inwardly smacking their lips over a nicely seasoned *bonne bouche* of Sunday afternoon gossip. John, looking red and thunderous, marched back to Grosvenor

Square, carrying his umbrella as if it were a rod wherewith to chasten impenitent blackguards. Angela held her ivory prayer-book tighter than was necessary, but a passing duchess, who bowed and smiled, erased some anxious lines about her pretty forehead. At luncheon, too, entertaining a very gay party, she was quite herself, although she noticed that John never opened his mouth except to put food and drink into it, much too much of the latter.

The irony of Fate decreed that only the day before the big fellow had gone over some belated accounts, including his bank-book. Even with his notoriously slovenly business habits, he could not fail to notice that a cheque for £3,000, given to Angela some six months before, had not been presented. Why?

After luncheon he went upstairs to the school-room, kissed Poppet, took her on his knee, and told her solemnly that he was sorry he had spoken so roughly. When she cuddled up to him, he said, in a rather thick voice:

"What was that you said about Uncle Hugo promising to come back?"

Poppet, with a child's tenacious memory in regard to anything or anybody that challenged her interest, gave details. John listened. Then he went back to his own den, drank two cups of coffee, three glasses of old brandy, and smoked, much too quickly, an immense cigar.

But he did not get a chance of speaking alone

with Angela till late that night, after a great dinner at a very great house in which it had been abundantly demonstrated that pretty sinners married to complaisant husbands with eighty thousand a year are not to be held too rigorously responsible for their peccadilloes. Angela, in a white frock and wearing no jewels, had looked immaculate. Indeed, a Personage had observed that it was quite impossible to think ill of such a dazzling creature. John, it was remarked, might have been the lady's father, and not a father that a discriminating daughter would choose, if she were given a free hand. John certainly had acquired the middle-age spread, and also that mottled complexion which indicates the abuse of strong waters.

"I want to speak to you," said John, pausing at the door of his den.

"To-morrow, dear. I am so tired."

"To-night."

She followed him into a room which smelt very strongly of tobacco. John shut the door. Then he said heavily:

"That big cheque I gave you six months ago has never been presented."

Angela was frightened, because one little corner of John's mind had remained unexplored by her. She didn't know, as yet, what John's final judgment of Hugo might be. McAllister, K.C., had thrown dust in his eyes, and the family solicitors had evoked a sort of pea-soup fog. Lastly, she herself, detesting

both dust and fogs, had created a mirage. John had given her this particular cheque because he had been made to believe that Hugo was one of those who love and run away.

And now, if he discovered the facts, he would be very horrid.

Angela prided herself upon telling the truth whenever a fib was sure to be detected.

"Hugo Charteris tore it up."

"Why?"

"Because he insisted upon giving me another. I looked upon it as a reparation. After the decree I had really no right to accept money from you. But he—well, he owed me something."

"He gave you a cheque for three thousand pounds?"

"Yes."

"Um!"

Angela could not determine whether or not he was angry with her. She laid her hand upon his arm, and said sweetly:

"I didn't tell you, because I thought it would vex you. And, of course, he was right: I ought to have refused that cheque of yours."

"But you didn't."

He was beginning to grapple with the problem in grim earnest. His forehead became corrugated with the effort of unaccustomed thought.

"You were so nice," she whispered. "I shall never forget your coming to me—never!"

"Um!" said John for the second time. "When did *he* come—eh?"

"Just after you went away. It was rather odd; you might have met. And you remember, don't you, that you gave the cheque to Poppet? She brought it to me when he was standing in front of me. He guessed what it was, made me hand it over, and tore it up."

"And then——?"

There is nothing really so confusing (and witless) as brevity. John's curt questions fell upon his wife's mind with numbing violence.

"And then he went away—vanished. I promised you that I wouldn't see him, and I didn't. My dear old darling, I'm so sleepy."

"Hadn't he the decency to say something about coming back?"

"I can't remember just what was said."

"Did you ask him to come back?"

"Did I ask him to come back?" She laughed lightly, but a keener observer than John might have detected a quaver of fear. "I don't ask men to come to me, *mon vieux*. Did I ask you? No; you came of your own accord."

"Did you ask him?"

He seized her wrist, staring into her eyes.

"Of course not!"

"You—liar!"

Then he let himself go, brutally, without restraint, having never acquired the habit of self-control.

She sank back upon a chair, while he stood over her, a colossus, an ogre to whom she was bound for ever and ever, linked to him by her act, not his. His mental activity amazed her. Holding him too cheap, she had never suspected that the stupidest person may develop latent cleverness when personal issues are at stake. The biggest fool that ever worked for another never forgets to draw his own wage. John had seen Hugo through the judge's spectacles—seen him as the false friend, the abominable guest, the deliberate seducer who gratifies his desires regardless of his victim; Hugo as the snake in the grass, poor Angela as the fascinated, fluttering bird—this, McAllister's favourite image, had impressed itself upon his inert brain.

"You fooled him, and you fooled me. You let me think you were abandoned, and all the time you had wrung a promise from him to come back and marry you the very moment the marriage could become legal. It was a devilish clever game, my girl, because you knew that Hugo and I would never speak again to each other on this earth, and that neither was likely to blab to others. You wanted me because I was the richer, and because society would wink its eye if we came together again. But you were not quite sure of me, so you tied him up tight as wax, and then cut loose when he did come back. Not a word! Your own child gave you away—the

child you used as a lure. Damn it! that was too thick! And now——”

He paused, glaring at her. She met his glance, conscious of an abominable interrogation in it. He continued thickly :

“Poppet loves him. I believe—I believe——”

“No, no!” she cried shrilly. “Poppet is yours. I swear it!”

“How do I know? Why should I believe you? I shall never believe a word you say again.”

He turned from her, almost staggering, and went out of the room. She shuddered, relieved from the fear of personal violence, but knowing that for the future he would always look at Poppet with a terrible question in his eyes. That would be his eternal punishment. And henceforward he would do what he pleased, regardless of her. Nor would he improve with increasing years. He would drink more, smoke more, swear more—intemperate in all things. He would keep her as his chattel, because she was the mother of Poppet, and because, perhaps the stronger reason, like most thick-skinned men, he had a horror of ridicule. She felt no pity for him, but she pitied his wife.

That night she cried herself to sleep. John, alone in his dressing-room, never slept a wink. But next day the rearrangement of the drawing-room furniture distracted her, and she experienced a real thrill of pleasure in super-

intending the hanging of a Greuze bought in Paris. The laughing nymph peering out of the genuine Louis XV. frame was not unlike Angela herself. There was the same roguish glance flashing from blue eyes, half veiled by heavy lids; the red lips, revealing a row of white teeth—recalling the old simile, "Rose filled with snow"—had the same curves as her own. Angela knew that this was a portrait of the artist's wife, the bookseller's daughter, who had beguiled the painter into marriage, and who had made him the most wretched of men. Remembering this, she smiled frostily. She might be afraid of her bear, and unable to teach him better manners, but, all the same, if he misbehaved, he should be made to dance to her piping. In any case, she had her prettier things.

After the morning's labour, she found herself with an excellent appetite for luncheon.

That afternoon Hugo found a sealed letter at his club, with John's big, thick, sprawling handwriting on the envelope.

"I have just discovered that you destroyed a cheque of mine some six months ago. Angela tells me that she accepted one of yours instead. I return it. No acknowledgment is necessary."

Hugo's first impulse was to destroy the cheque. Nothing would be more likely to irritate John than the reflection that he

sinned-against angel had used three thousand pounds belonging to an unspeakable black-guard. To tear it up, however, meant the infliction of a blow below the belt, a blow impossible to guard or return.

"I'll have a flutter with this," he thought.

He had gambled mildly upon many race-courses, and at the tables at Ostend and Monte Carlo, but never on the Stock Exchange. But he had acquaintances in and about Capel Court, and often he had listened with interest to their tales of success and disaster. He went to one of these and asked for advice. The friend, after a word or two, divined that a craving for excitement had brought Hugo to the City, and the movement seemed to be pat for a big rise in prices. Hugo listened with quickening interest. Then he lunched at a City club, and met other men with whom he had shot and hunted. All and sundry talked shop. The magnates were indicated. They seemed to Hugo very ordinary individuals, and yet something about them challenged his interest and curiosity. After luncheon he smoked a cigar with a big operator in the Kaffir market: a man whom he knew slightly, and generally considered a dull dog out of his office. Here, however, upon his own pitch, he assumed the god. Parasites encircled him, with ears cocked for any chance word that might fall from his lips. He treated them, so Hugo noticed, with contemptuous indifference.

"And what are you doing here?" he asked, turning his cold glance upon the outsider.

Hugo laughed.

"I wanted to see you at work. Are you a bull or a bear?"

"For the moment a bear." He lowered his voice, adding in a curiously tired voice, "Some men here would like to know that."

Hugo regarded him more attentively. The man was past middle life, and far from robust.

"I wonder you've not dropped out of the ring long ago," murmured Hugo.

"I wonder at that myself, Charteris. I used to say that I would go when I had made five thousand a year. Then I raised the figure to ten, fifteen, and twenty. Now I know the truth: I can't retire. The sort of life you lead would kill me in six months."

He got up and walked away. Hugo's friend came back. At once he asked eagerly: "Did he tell you anything?"

"He said he couldn't retire."

"Retire? I should rather think not. He's got a power here. The great Panjandrum in his own line."

Then both men plunged again into business talk.

Hugo found himself thrilled and excited. The ardour of the chase had seized him, for the nimble dollar is a quarry as alluring (and as elusive) as a Rocky Mountain goat.

During the following three weeks he went

each day to the City. Fortune smiled and frowned with exasperating impartiality. Hugo hungered for a *coup*, but his friend insisted upon the due exercise of caution. Of course, if a real chance presented itself, why, then—

Six weeks passed quickly. The season was now over, but Hugo lingered on in town, more and more engrossed in the struggle which he witnessed daily. It tickled his humour that John's cheque should have afforded him such amusement. He found himself pitying men pledged to shoot grouse; and a yacht in the Solent presented itself as the dreariest of prisons. In this mood, a proposal from his stockbroking friend found acceptance.

"You have money," said that gentleman. "If you are keen about a real big thing, we may pull it off; but frankly, we won't do it with three thousand pounds. Speaking as a pal, I advise you to leave speculation alone, but if you won't, you won't! Things are going to be very lively, one way or another."

Then it was made plain to Hugo that his friend was about to venture all he had upon the rise of certain American securities, generally regarded as "gilt-edged," which had fallen of late—quite unaccountably, so said the wise men—to a most tempting price.

Many persons, living far, indeed, from Threadneedle Street, have cause to remember with bitterness the American panic. But perhaps of the innumerable men and women

who were torn to pieces by the beasts of the market-place, none suffered mutilation with greater fortitude than Hugo Charteris. The forces latent in him asserted themselves. He fought disaster with the same dogged determination which Edward manifested in his struggle against falling rents and depreciated land values.

He threw himself and his money into the fight, and in losing one regained the other. When he was told that his fortune had shrunk to a few thousands, he laughed. His broker thought him mad, because Hugo said seriously:

"I believed I was dead, but I'm alive!" Then, with a humorous flicker of his lips, he added: "Thanks to you."

Nevertheless, failure, not the loss of money, gnawed upon his self-respect. And he realised that he was not likely to succeed where men, wiser and more experienced, had come to utter grief.

More, his experiment had increased rather than diminished his distaste for life in cities. In a sense, the men of Capel Court differed but slightly from the men of Mayfair. Drones and workers alike were slaves in their pursuit of pleasure or gold; although Mammon, perhaps, exacted even greater sacrifices of her victims than Plutus.

A curious nostalgia began to possess him. He thought, night and day, of sublimated

spaces in Canada and Australia, of the great pampas of the Argentine, of that silent land of forest and lakes in British Columbia.

Finally, he decided to go abroad for a few weeks. By chance he happened to read René Bazin's "Terre qui meurt." The vivid descriptions of "La Vendée" created a primitive atmosphere, an effect, it will be remembered, produced in him by Joy Vennable's songs. The cry of Mother Earth, abandoned by her most stalwart sons, echoed in his heart. His natural instincts whispered to him that he would do well to obey this call of the wild.

CHAPTER XX

BEFORE he left London, he called upon Esmé Burgess. The hope of the New Brooms had moved into comfortable lodgings in the city of Westminster, within a stone's-throw of St. Stephen's Tower. Snug quarters, but not easy to find, and disagreeably close to some of the worst slums in London. Hugo paid his visit in the morning, walking across St. James's Park. As he strolled along, he noticed many loafers upon the grass, enjoying sun-baths, probably the only baths they ever took. It was warm, and a slight steam arose out of ground still moist from a shower which had fallen during the night. One of the loafers, spying a toff, asked for alms. The man had a fairly honest face and a stout body.

"Why aren't you at work?" said Hugo.

"'Cause I carn't get none," replied the man shortly. "If yer think I like ter do nothink, yer makin' an error. Look at my 'ands!" He held out a pair, palm uppermost, with the signs of hard work freshly impressed on them. "I've 'ad ter do nothink fer a week, and I 'ate it. Yer carn't get no taste outer nothink."

Hugo presented him with half a crown.

"I wish I could give you a job instead."

"Thank ye, my lord. I wish to Gawd you could."

Hugo strolled on, muttering to himself: "Yer carn't get no taste outer nothink."

He paused for a moment, after passing through Storey's Gate, gazing at the Houses of Parliament. Instantly he was seized with a passionate envy of Burgess, who had found his job, the job he loved, something really worth while, with a taste to it likely to last as long as he lived. Hugo had no stomach for politics; but he had known politicians intimately, and he had noticed with what zest and energy the better sort tackled their work, regardless of the sacrifices it entailed. The better sort! Who were they? Those who justified existence by doing something, no matter what, with willing hands and brain.

Not being in any hurry, he crossed the road and stood by the statue of Boadicea, looking down the river towards Hungerford Bridge. His eye brightened as it followed the splendid curve of the left bank, dwelling for a moment upon the great ducal house in the foreground, and wandering on, past the two huge caravan-serai, till it rested finally upon the dome of St. Paul's, standing out against the azure sky, and dominating triumphantly all other buildings. The sun shone upon its gilded vane,

which seemed to radiate quivering lines of light.

Could it be possible that the foundations of this monumental pile were insecure? Could one conceive this superb masterpiece crumbling and collapsing into ruin and chaos? Or suppose—a more poignant thought—the collapse of what it represented, the crumbling of the faith preached beneath its dome, leaving the temple empty, a mere Valhalla of the mighty dead within its tombs!

Well, if such catastrophes came to pass, it would be for the unanswerable reason that the foundations were rotten, or, if solid in themselves, laid upon sand instead of rock. Time was the infallible test of each. As Burgess said, "Let the truth prevail!" He could hear the young fellow's ringing voice, and see his eager, flushed face. And, after all had been said and done—and really one's brain reeled at the mere thought of what had been said and done during the last six thousand years or so—the one inevitable conclusion was that nothing false endured. For that reason the two great parties in Westminster were doomed. The country, as a whole, was sick to death of their interminable misrepresentations and evasions and obscurities, and the members of both Houses—those, at least, whose judgment was not hopelessly discoloured by inherited prejudice—were sick to death of running mute, hounded to the divisions by the Whips, for-

bidden to give tongue as individuals, commanded to bark out the common cry of a pack.

Hugo was forsaking Boadicea when his attention was arrested by a number of paddle-steamers anchored in mid-stream. These were the boats which had carried as passengers nothing more remunerative than the extravagant hopes of the London County Council, and as ballast their coagulated inexperience and ignorance. Here they lay, a fleet of pretty vessels, derelict.

He began to feel irritation, because every object bristled with moral lessons, each with a personal application. Was he anchored in mid-stream, compelled to rust out?

With a shrug of his shoulders he walked rapidly towards Burgess's lodgings.

The hope of the New Brooms received him frostily, but with civility. He looked rather pale and thin, as if he were overworked. He admitted that he was up to his eyes in construction, which, indeed, is a pleasanter and easier task than reconstruction. Bit by bit he thawed out, for Hugo discreetly questioned him about his successes.

"I'm going to Manchester"—he named the day, to be recalled thereafter to Hugo—"and I'm booked for a big speech, a two hours' job. The Socialists are making a bid for us; but I tell you, although it's not discreet to say so in public, that we're not truckling to

the washed or the unwashed. Do you know that the *Saxon* is selling like hot cakes? We've doubled and trebled our circulation in the last month."

He poured out details while Hugo listened, divining that the young fellow was intoxicated by the sense of power. But at the first reasonable pause he said quietly:

"I came, Burgess, to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?"

"I'm leaving England."

"Alone?"

"Very much alone."

"But now——" Burgess hesitated, raising his brows.

"Go on," said Hugo, glad that Burgess should open up the real object of his visit. The young fellow, no craner at hairy fences, jumped boldly.

"You are free to ask Joy Vennable to be your wife."

"Am I?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" He laughed derisively. "And you know her. Didn't I tell you that she looked at me, by Heaven! as if I was unclean? And I was."

"Six months ago."

"I did you a great service six months ago." He paused for a moment. This was the real object of his visit: to make confession without thought of absolution.

"A service?" repeated Burgess wonderingly. He stared at a face which had assumed the hardness and impassivity commented upon so unfavourably by the reporters.

"I tried to take Joy by force. A sort of moral rape."

"Really, Charteris, I'm in a fog."

At that, Hugo described what had passed, without excuse or comment, sensible that the story was an ugly one. Burgess listened attentively.

At the end Hugo said, in the same impersonal tone:

"I wrecked what chance I had. She might have forgiven me what went before—when she heard that Tempest and his wife had come together again—had I remained, through thick and thin, loyal to Mrs. Tempest."

"I suppose somebody told Mrs. Tempest. Mollie Mottisfont, eh?"

"No." This, perhaps, was the most difficult part of the story. He laughed again. "The fact is, Burgess, Mrs. Tempest didn't want me either."

"I beg your pardon for asking an impertinent question."

"You have the right to ask any question. I'm here on your account, not mine. I admit that I put off coming as long as I could. I feel cheap, but I should feel cheaper if I bolted, leaving you to think that time might whitewash me in Joy's eyes. Time is on the side of truth,

not falsehood. That has been rubbed into me till I'm pretty sore. And now I see myself as she sees me. One can't jaw about these things. If I'd run off with that woman openly, I should hold my head higher."

"She wouldn't go."

"I was the stronger. First and last, I am responsible. McAllister made that plain. Joy knows it. I wallowed in the mire for three years—and I knew it was mire. Enough of that! You must try your luck again. Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Written?"

"No."

"She is—well?"

"Perfectly well, I believe."

The young fellow's chin stuck out rather aggressively, as if he resented these questions. And his eyes, so bright when he had been talking of his work, were now dull and irresponsible. Was it possible that he had become indifferent?

"You're not making things any too easy for me, Burgess."

"She will never care for me," said Burgess slowly, but with conviction. "Therefore, the less I see of her the better for me and my work."

"The work comes first now, does it?"

"It's hardly fair to put it that way. I suppose a fellow clings to what is his own. She

was never mine—never! She made that clear.” He rose from his chair and began to speak excitedly, using the familiar gestures, pacing up and down. “I’m obliged to you for coming, Charteris. It was a beastly job, and you did it on my account.”

“And on hers.”

“Yes, yes; but, to put it brutally, you spoiled my chance—if I ever had a chance—and you spoiled hers. If she won’t take you, she’ll die a maid. That’s my honest opinion. It’s rather a case of Humpty-Dumpty, who ought to have been a girl. Men get over these tumbles, but some women don’t. She’s her father’s daughter. He had stuff in him to write another big book, but, because the first was forestalled, he bought a butterfly-net. And she’s half Mottisfont, and, therefore, obstinate. Only idiots ignore these things. I’ve enough of the strain in me to tell you, quite frankly, that a sensible man like you had better not waste his time mending broken crockery.”

“Crockery?”

“Porcelain, when we speak of her.”

“I thought you were a flesh and blood man—a trier. There isn’t anybody else, is there?”

Hugo rose too; the men confronted each other. Burgess’s eyes were sparkling again, but his face retained its expression of spirituality, as if he had put from him, not perhaps without a fierce struggle, all desires other than those connected with his political ambitions.

"There's nobody else," he answered vehemently. "Do you think that I've time for philandering? And it's once bit, twice sh with me, I can assure you. I'm going to leave women alone, and stick to my job for a few years or so. I've put Joy from me."

"You have, indeed," said Hugo, taking him literally, "if you leave the best thing in the world out of your life. I tell you, Burgess, you're making a mistake."

"And I'll tell you this, also," replied Burgess hotly "While you live I shall not ask the woman who loved you to be my wife. She might take me, yes, if I pestered her—take me out of a queer mixture of pity and affection which seems to pass for the right thing with some girls; but I want a warmer sentiment than that. I want what you call the best thing in the world, not the second best. Now you have it in a nutshell."

A minute later the men had parted.

Hugo went back to his flat, and stared for some time at a small marble bust of Clytie astonishingly like Joy, if one could conceive Joy with her hair parted in the middle and serenely at rest. He had the feeling that Joy might have acquired this adorable expression of repose, had not the inspector at Southleigh interposed a strong arm between him and the Avonmouth express.

Presently he took the bust into his bedroom and placed it among the things which he in-

tended to take abroad. A week later he reached Easthampton, about six in the evening. The St. Malo boat, the *Luna*, was sailing at midnight. Hugo dined alone at the Station Hotel, and after dinner, while drinking a cup of coffee, picked up a local paper. A headline met his eye :

“Funeral of the Rev. George Vennable.”

He groaned with dismay. Joy, forlorn and desolate, seemed to fill the big, dreary room. Hurriedly he read a short obituary notice, in which mention was made of the *Boletus Vennabilis*, but not a word about Joy. Many Mottisfont's had attended the funeral. Hugo could hear their condolences rasping Joy's ears; their endless platitudes, their well-meaning inanities and ineptitudes. He hoped to find Esmé Burgess's name amongst this crowd of cousins and kinsmen. Burgess would say and do the rare right thing. No mention was made of the young fellow; and then Hugo remembered suddenly that on this particular date he was delivering a brilliant speech at Manchester. Hugo had read the speech and the comments upon it the morning after it was delivered. So that was the reason why Burgess had not attended the funeral.

He threw down the paper with an exclamation which made an elderly gentleman start.

Burgess must have known that he was wanted. Doubtless he would defend himself in half a dozen more or less convincing

phrases. Engagements with the British public must be kept. The greatest clown that ever lived had to crack his jokes at Drury Lane when his wife lay dead at home!

Nevertheless, a better or worse man would have travelled south instead of north.

Hugo glanced at his watch, remembering that Tisdale, whose name was on the list of those present in Hernshaw Magna Churchyard, lived in a suburb of Easthampton. He must see him.

He crossed the road, went on board the *Luna*, interviewed the head steward, was shown his cabin, and deposited his suit-case. Then, having two hours to spare, he jumped into a cab.

Much to his disappointment, Tisdale was out in attendance on a patient. The elderly woman who opened the door said that he would be back in a few minutes, and asked Hugo to come in and wait.

He hesitated a moment, looked at his watch, and entered.

CHAPTER XXI

THE woman, evidently a superior sort of caretaker, ushered him into Tisdale's sitting-room, lined with books, and agreeably lighted by two lamps with green shades.

Hugo lit a cigar and looked about him, examining his surroundings with interest, for Tisdale's strong personality was stamped upon everything. Time- and labour-saving devices indicated the busy man with a highly developed faculty for order. Case-books, bound in leather and dated, diaries and notebooks, filled one glazed and locked cupboard above a broad mahogany desk. Another cupboard, open, revealed pigeon-holes filled with pamphlets upon sanitation, diet, cheap foods, education, and the better housing of the very poor. Upon a small table near the armchair lay a French book in a yellow-paper cover, and beside it a small dictionary.

"Oh, ho!" said Hugo to himself.

But the French book, fresh from the press, was evidently the last word on bacteriology. From notes on the broad margin, Hugo perceived that Tisdale was no French scholar. The dictionary bore signs of much use.

Hugo sat down in the armchair. It struck him as odd that Joy Vennable should be loved by three men so dissimilar. Burgess and Tisdale, however, had this quality in common: each gave to his profession undivided energies and attention; each made engagements not lightly to be broken. But Tisdale had gone to the funeral, and Burgess to Manchester.

"Tisdale is the better man," thought Hugo.

He recalled Tisdale's fight with diphtheria—a fight against great odds, fought to a finish, and culminating in a great victory for science.

Feeling restless, he got up and browsed about the other bookshelves. The poets were represented, not the novelists. It was plain, too, that Tisdale preferred Browning to Tennyson: matter appealed to him more than manner. There were a few histories, no memoirs, and the textbooks upon science were strictly up to date.

Half an hour passed. Tisdale, no doubt, had been delayed: summoned elsewhere, possibly. Meantime, how much did Tisdale know or suspect? For one thing, he had never believed in a match between Joy and her cousin; but it was like him to underrate the chances of a younger and weaker rival.

Tisdale rushed in. At first he had difficulty in recognising Hugo, much changed by the shaving off of his beard.

"I am crossing to France to-night. I was

going on board when I read the notice of George Vennable's funeral."

"Yes, yes," said Tisdale. "I was there."

His face betrayed a slight nervousness and curiosity; the pupils of his keen eyes were dilated.

"How is Miss Vennable?" said Hugo impassively.

Tisdale had turned his back and was half-way across the room.

Catching Hugo's eye, he said quietly:

"I'm very much worried about her."

"What is she going to do?"

"I don't know."

"You can make a guess, I suppose."

Tisdale sat down. His deliberation began to irritate Hugo. He cared nothing about the boat. If he missed it altogether he could take another. He was concerned solely with Joy. He would have liked to shake the truth out of Tisdale: to force him to speak with entire frankness, revealing all that he knew and suspected. Tisdale filled a pipe, lighted it, and puffed at it. Then he said slowly:

"George Vennable died suddenly, fell back in his chair. There was no suffering. He hoped to go like that, and he did. He spoke of you to me only a few weeks ago. He was sorry you left Hernshaw so suddenly. He wanted to thank you; to——"

"Then he never knew?"

"You didn't think I'd tell him, Charteris?"

"She might!"

"She?"

"Miss Vennable. Mrs. Giles Mottisfont recognised me. She was calling at the Rectory when I came in. She gave me away."

"That was rather awful."

"Yes."

"Miss Vennable took it hard?"

Hugo nodded. In a tone of sympathy Tisdale murmured:

"I am partly to blame for this, Charteris. Perhaps I can put things straight. It—it's my duty to put things straight. Forgive me." He laid his hand upon Hugo's knee. "But I saw in the papers that Mr. and Mrs. Tempest had come together again."

Hugo laughed.

"I met them in the Park last June."

"On that account you are going abroad?"

"No. I'm going abroad because I no longer care a hang for the things I used to do, or the people I used to know. And, besides, I've had a smash." Then, derisively, he described the plunge into a panic. He ended up: "I'm left nearly naked, but not ashamed."

"I see: you want a job?"

"Yes; I want a job, an out-of-doors job, a pioneering job; but where, geographically, am I to find one?"

"What on earth made you speculate?"

"What drives men to drugs or drink?"

He spoke lightly, but Tisdale saw that he

winned. And then he saw more. With hardly suppressed excitement, the doctor leaned forward.

"You cared for Joy Vennable?"

"Yes."

Able to speak, Hugo spoke at length. Tisdale listened, frowning, filling up the gaps in the narrative, understanding perfectly what was left unsaid. When he finished, the doctor's face was twitching. After years of practice he had not the self-control of the other.

"And she couldn't forgive you?"

Hugo shook his head.

"But she cared for you?" There was passion in his tone. "Burgess made no mistake about that, eh? You are quite sure that you were the other?"

"For your sake, would to God I was not sure! She will never be mine, and I wish, from the bottom of my heart, that she could be a better fellow's. Can you believe that, Tisdale?"

"Yes."

"There are things that cannot be hidden. Love and tobacco-smoke, eh? When I turned after shutting the door upon that purring cat, hell was in my heart, and heaven on her face. Joy believed in me."

"She loved you, and let you go."

"She let go a stranger. I'm a sort of Hyde in her eyes. And because she has the brains and the heart to see clearly abominations, I love her. And, being the woman she is, how can

she help loathing me? If I could have dragged her down to my level—I was tempted—I——”

“You thought of that?”

“Yes. There must have been laughter among the gods. They laid the trap for me, and I walked into it.”

“That was the end?”

“Not quite. I wrote a letter.”

“Explaining?”

“Yes,” he laughed softly. “And I despised myself, because from the beginning I knew what I was about. A certain lady may not be the unsophisticated victim the British public believes her to be, but that fact does not white-wash me.”

“Joy answered the letter?”

“I have her answer here.”

He took from his pocket an envelope, soiled and frayed at the edges. A surgeon sees humanity at its best and worst, and the eyes, perceiving beneath fair white flesh the lesion that presently the knife will lay bare, perceive also the misery, the despair, underlying the smooth brow and bravely smiling mouth. The men and women who walk into the operating-room with a firm step and a jest upon their lips excite more pity and sympathy than the weaklings, tottering, wailing, to an inevitable ordeal.

Because Hugo smiled, as he handed Joy's letter to Tisdale, the latter turned away his eyes.

"A strong man can always find work in this world. My last word is: Begin again!"

The handwriting was uneven, as if it had been written by a woman with dimmed eyes and trembling fingers. Tisdale, with a sigh, returned it to Hugo. When he spoke again, he assumed his abrupt professional tone.

"She is right, Charteris. And the message means as much to you as to me. My work, thank God, lies ready to my hand. What yours is I don't know. I believe that you will find it if you look for it. Somewhere in England, or out of England, a job is waiting for you. As for her——"

He paused, thinking intently, endeavouring to change the point of view, to see the future with a woman's eyes.

"Tell me about her."

"For two months her looks have worried me. I thought she was fretting about her father. Now I understand. She has suffered abominably. I don't think she will ever marry."

"Burgess said that!"

"Did he? It's something not easily explained, something in the temperament and character which stretches back and back for generations, something peculiar to our northern races. Look at the women devoting their lives to other women's children: the nurses, governesses, and maiden aunts! Potentially, nearly all these spinsters were

intended to be mothers, and the maternal instinct cannot be destroyed, although it may be diverted, and perhaps perverted. Many of them remain single because they cannot marry one particular man. The primal woman had no such scruples. Well, we are in deep waters, but I predict that Joy Vennable will devote her life to children not her own. She won't take me, and she won't take Esmé Burgess. I don't waste much pity on him."

"Why not?"

"He is wrapped up in himself, in his career, in his ambitions, which are worthy enough. For the next five years he will do better alone. A wife, the very best, would be a sort of drag on him. In a sense, what applies to him applies to me, or did apply to me. For the past five years I've hardly had a minute I could call my own. I don't complain. I've enjoyed the fight. But a man must have some minutes to share with a wife, and the right kind of women don't want men who can do without them. Nothing in the world makes a good woman so miserable as the thought that she's a drag on the man she loves. Burgess and I would have an attenuated chance if he lost his tongue and I my right hand. Hallo!"

The clock began to chime.

"Great Scott! I've made you miss your boat."

"It doesn't matter a bit. I foresaw the possibility."

"You must stop here."

Tisdale had a small spare room, always kept in order. He showed Hugo over his flat, which occupied the ground-floor of his house, expatiating with enthusiasm upon its advantages. He kept no bothering servants; his landlady "did" for him. The consulting-room and dispensary had a separate entrance.

"Very snug," said Hugo.

"I had to plot and plan," Tisdale admitted, "for I hadn't a bob to spare. I could afford a house of my own now, but, bless you, I prefer this. We'll have a nightcap."

With the cunningly concealed intention to distract Hugo's mind and prepare it for sleep, he began a description of his struggles against disease and poverty in Easthampton. The dreary monotony of the narrative seemed to permeate his voice. Hugo felt that his eyes were closing. Tisdale smiled and touched him.

"Let's turn in."

Hugo started.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he muttered, rubbing his eyes; "but I slept badly last night."

"You'll sleep well this."

The good fellow had dropped a tabloid into his guest's whisky-and-soda.

"Good-night!" said Hugo, on the threshold

of the prophet's chamber, which in size and neatness resembled a ship's cabin. He grasped Tisdale's hand hard. "I'm glad I missed that boat," he added slowly.

At that moment the captain of the *Luna* was standing alone on his quarter-deck, peering into a mist which was thickening into fog. An old man, one who had served at sea for more than fifty years, the time was near at hand when he could retire with a well-earned pension. The night was very still, and the waters of the Channel so smooth that the ship seemed to be gliding over them with the swift, tranquil flight of an albatross. Upon the port quarter the Needles stood sharply out. Passing them, the captain had noticed that the westerly breeze was failing, and the stars shining less clearly; but, as yet, he could see far ahead, although his eyesight, admittedly, was not what it had been. Wracks of mist, illumined by the ship's lights, glimmered out of the mirk and disappeared.

The Captain could not see fog, but he could smell it. What he did see, quite plainly, was the small cottage and garden near Sea View, in the Isle of Wight, which was his, bought and paid for, the cottage wherein his wife and he expected to spend the remaining years of life; a snug harbourage for such ancient and weather-beaten craft. Upon nights such as this, when a child might take command, he

had conjured up the vision of this cottage ten thousand times. It represented not merely the hard-earned savings of a lifetime, but other subtle, indescribable things for which strong men struggle and wait, often with infinite patience, knowing, perhaps, in their inmost souls that the striving is what is really worth while, and that the castle in Spain or the whitewashed cottage overlooking the Solent are in truth the places, the pleasant, peaceful places, in which they can only find rest when their work, whatever it may be, is honourably accomplished.

Suddenly the vision faded. The captain realised that the air was dank and chill. Upon his starboard bow the waters of the Channel stretched dark grey and shining; but to the left and ahead lay an inky blackness. The *Luna* was cutting through the tail of a big fog-bank. At the same moment, out of the sooty silence came a long-drawn-out wail, a deep, plaintive note, like the cry of the loon, the great diver of the North American lakes.

Across the calm surface of that summer sea it boomed with increasing volume of sound, and then died away in a weird diminuendo.

The captain recognised one of the new sirens recently adopted by some of the Atlantic liners, differing from the older instruments by reason of its higher note and more flute-like, penetrating qualities. Im-

mediately he pulled a string, and the *Luna* bellowed forth an answering roar, as she plunged into the edge of the fog. As it swallowed her up, the siren of the liner spoke again. The captain felt the sweat start upon his face as he gave the order to "Reverse engines; full steam astern!" Again he pulled the cord behind him, and this time the *Luna* seemed to awake to the knowledge of her peril, for she roared like a steer, mad with terror, when he feels the teeth of a tiger in his throat. At the same moment the vast liner appeared, rearing up its enormous bulk like some phantom monster, towering above the tiny *Luna*. The captain stared full into the green and red eyes of the leviathan. Bells rang out shrilly. Just below the captain a young woman was screaming. A few minutes before, the captain had seen her pacing the promenade-deck with her husband by her side. Coming down Easthampton Water, the mate had told him, with a sly wink, that the pair were bride and groom, on their way, if a man might infer as much from the labels on their luggage, to spend a honeymoon in Touraine. While the woman screamed, the man slashed at the thin cord which secured a lifebuoy. The captain bent over and shouted to him, telling him that the cork-jackets were under a bench a few paces aft. The man looked up and nodded. Face to face with a stupendous emergency, he seemed to be cool

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and alert. By this time the passengers were pouring out of the cabins, dazed with terror. The flukes of the port-anchor of the liner were within five-and-twenty yards of the *Luna's* smoke-stack.

The captain set his teeth, and grasped the brass rail in front of him.

By eight o'clock the next morning Easthampton knew that the *Luna* had been cut in half by one of the big liners, and had sunk like a stone with more than half the passengers and crew. Only those on deck, and not all of them, had been rescued. Tisdale heard the news by chance through the telephone. In the next room Hugo was still sleeping.

The housekeeper came in. Tisdale told her that a friend was with him. Then he called Hugo, who seemed the better for a sound night's sleep; his eyes had lost their slightly congested look; his skin had cleared. "He has tremendous vitality," reflected Tisdale. "What a pity it should run to waste!" This, indeed, was his hobby: the conservation of energy. It exasperated him that, although the tides ebbed and flowed twice during each day, the world made no practical use of this tremendous manifestation of force.

After breakfast Hugo looked at his watch, and said carelessly:

"The *Luna* is due at St. Malo at ten. I must wire to the chief steward."

Then Tisdale said slowly :

"Do you believe in coincidence, Charteris?"

"Coincidence?"

"I don't," continued Tisdale. "I try to see purpose behind everything. I am no sectarian; dogma and doctrine are empty words to me; but I believe profoundly in Almighty God."

Hugo stared at him. The match with which he was about to light his pipe flickered and went out. Tisdale leant forward. His voice trembled.

"Was it chance brought you here last night?"

"Something has happened," said Hugo quickly.

"Yes. The *Luna* will not arrive at St. Malo to-day. She went down last night, a few miles to the south-west of the Needles!"

Hugo repeated the words in a sort of dazed whisper, and then there was a long silence, before Tisdale added the details. Hugo listened stupefied, unable at first to apprehend the catastrophe. Then he started up.

"It's not in the papers."

"It will be in the afternoon papers."

"I must wire to my brother's wife."

Tisdale noticed the odd wording. Why should Charteris wire to his brother's wife instead of to his brother? With a gesture he indicated some forms upon the right side of his desk. Hugo scribbled a few lines, and

then stood up, staring at Tisdale with a curious light in his eyes.

"So you are convinced that there is a purpose behind everything?"

"Absolutely."

Hugo laughed.

"If you are right, it's my duty to try to interpret that purpose."

"Well?"

Hugo did not answer. He began to pace up and down the small room. Presently he paused.

"Did you tell your landlady that I was here? Mention what an escape I had had?"

"No. I couldn't gossip with her about it."

"Nine men out of ten would have done so. Purpose again!"

Again he laughed, not ironically, but with a boyish spontaneity that astonished Tisdale. A minute or two passed, and then Hugo said incisively:

"Suppose I told you that I had a fancy to read my own obituary notices?"

"Are you joking, Charteris? At the expense of your family, your friends——"

"Hold hard! I'm deadly serious, Tisdale. I don't think I was ever so serious in my life, because this is an opportunity to do what Joy told me: *To begin again!*"

Tisdale gasped.

"You speak of my family. My half-brother will benefit by my death. The few thousands

that are left will lift the mortgage from the old place. He would never accept money from me. To his wife, who is a dear creature, to his sons and to every tenant on his property, my death will be the most opportune thing that could have happened."

"But——"

"Wait! You mentioned friends. I have no friends, Tisdale. A multitude of acquaintances—yes. I had friends—the right sort, I mean—once. I drifted away from them. I'm sick of England, sick to death of the aimless life I've led. What remains? Joy Vennable. How would my death affect her? You and Burgess may be right. As long as I live she may refuse to marry anybody else. If she believes me to be dead, she will be free."

Tisdale shook his head, shaken but not convinced by the words and manner of the speaker.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," he said slowly, "but how do you propose to live?"

"I've three hundred pounds in notes in my pocket; I've a strong body, and average brains."

"Without a profession, without a trade, you will starve, Charteris. Believe me—I know."

"I can earn a good living as a trapper."

"I hadn't thought of that. But the isolation, the——"

"Tisdale, if I can't earn a living, let me starve! But I can, and, by God, I will!"

He squared his shoulders and lifted his head. Tisdale, with a long experience of men, thought to himself that such a man was not likely to starve.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "I become a party to this fraud. Oh yes, put it how you like, it's a fraud; and I hate frauds. And it's stagey, melodramatic, and, in my opinion, unwise. You must give me time; and you must take time yourself."

"How much time?"

"A few hours at least."

"All right. I'll go for a walk."

"I protest emphatically against the whole absurd business. Sooner or later you will be identified."

"Let's face that possibility. I should tell the fellow that he was making a mistake. How could he prove that he wasn't? Last night, for instance, you hardly recognised me because I'd shaved off a beard which will grow again."

"You can begin in a new country without this ridiculous farce of a mock funeral."

"Can I? I'm not so sure of that. I've about eight hundred a year left; enough to make hard manual labour rather unnecessary. The remittance men, Tisdale, are always slackers and ne'er-do-wells. And I shall have no one to think of but myself. I tell you, I feel in my

bones that this is my chance of salvation—and, perhaps, Joy's."

He went out, leaving Tisdale agape with amazement and bewilderment.

The suburb of Easthampton where Tisdale lived is as ugly as design, necessarily utilitarian, can make it. The rows of small houses are built of a crude red brick and roofed with dull slates; the streets are laid out in straight lines upon flat and characterless ground. And the people who live there exhibit in their faces and clothes the same drab uniformity of expression. Even the little children are curiously alike. Respectability permeates the air. Real poverty is conspicuously absent, although, here and there, one may divine its presence, even behind genteel, highly varnished doors and lace-curtained windows.

Everywhere the gospel of work proclaims itself. Everybody works, saving the very young, the very old, and the infirm. On Sunday they take their ease in their stiff go-to-meeting clothes; and chapels are more frequent than churches.

As an object-lesson to illustrate forcibly the sacrifice of an income, Hugo Charteris could hardly have found a better place wherein to walk and think. And his was the eye of the hunter, trained to observe details which escape the vision of the average pilgrim. More than once in his life, in pursuit of some rare species

of game, he had plunged deep into an arid wilderness, knowing that if he failed to find water before night he must perish miserably. And always he had pushed on, impelled by that strange force which drives men to the accomplishment of seemingly unachievable enterprises.

In like manner he had braved again and again hunger and the atrocious extremes of great heat and cold. One cannot account for these things. Turn over the back numbers of the *Alpine Journal*. Read some vivid description of the conquering of a virgin peak, that first awful ascent of the Matterhorn, up which we, if we live long enough, may travel in a funicular railway. Why should strong, sane men risk their lives for admittedly no purpose other than the wish to place their feet where no human foot has trod before?

In the days of Charlemagne no man went mountain-climbing as a pastime, because, obviously, the workaday lives of gentle and simple were full enough of adventure and danger. And nobody to-day leaps into lions' dens to rescue a lady's glove; but in every part of the globe just such unreasonable and dangerous feats are being attempted by a few.

Hugo happened to be one of this small minority. And now, upon the psychical plane, he was about to explore a new country, probably arid, certainly strange, because innate to

him a force greater than himself was expanding and fructifying. To remain a weed on "Lethe's wharf" had become impossible.

He passed a mechanic with a bag of tools in his hand, hurrying from one job to another. The man's face was grimed with dirt, and deep lines lay about the mouth and eyes, although he was still young. Hugo marked the expression, never to be seen on the faces of the loungers in Piccadilly and Hyde Park: the expression which may be said to be the answer and justification of the Yankee injunction: "Root, hog, or die!" The bagman who repeated that homely saw had the same look, the inexorable determination to root and live.

Hugo walked on, leaving the houses behind. He found himself in a lane, between high hedges of thorn, in which sweetbriar and honeysuckle grew side by side with the poisonous foxglove and the acrid bryony. He passed a stream. Its clear but slow-flowing waters were being clogged with water-lilies and crowfoot.

Presently he sat down upon a stile, gazing reflectively at the pleasant English landscape. Curious thoughts wandered in and out of his mind. He recalled, with seeming irrelevance, some extraordinary pictures by a French symbolist, which he had seen in Paris about a year before. Angela had admired them. For his part he found them abominable,

because the men and the women seemed to be dead, whereas so-called inanimate things exhibited, or rather suggested, a hideous and monstrous life. One picture in particular had excited a nightmare horror in him. Two nude figures, a man and a woman, with livid skins and eyes eaten out by corruption, stood upon grass that was red, amongst reptilian trees, environed by loathsome tenacles of branches, while in the foreground amorphous forms of rocks, scaled like dragons, sprawled and crawled. These two might symbolise the last man and woman dead, after having infected Nature with the poison that had destroyed them.

For a long time he sat thus, seeing the past and the present, staring with unblinking gaze into the future. When he rose there was no indecision upon his face. Coming, he had walked slowly, the pace habitual to the man of leisure with nothing to kill except time; returning, he swung along briskly, walking with clean, elastic tread. So the mechanic had strode along to his work. And in Hugo's eyes, as in his, shone the same subtle flame which Prometheus stole from heaven.

He had made up his mind to—root!

CHAPTER XXII

Soon after her father's death Joy was aware that she would have to deliver an ultimatum, for the aunts, in making their niece the object of particular care, had driven her distracted with well-meaning words and actions. Miserable from grief, and with nerves on edge through want of sleep, the girl made a valiant effort not to hurt their feelings, an effort uncrowned with any compensating sense of success.

There had been difficulty in persuading Joy to leave her dead father, who lay upstairs on his bed with a smile upon his thin face. She was convinced that this smile held special meaning, being eloquent of encouragement, of resignation, and of rest. It expressed subtly a benediction. To the aunts and Sir Giles, however, Joy's unwillingness to leave the death-chamber (their word) indicated sensibilities which in a stranger might have been stigmatised as morbid.

Each in turn and alone had spent five minutes with the dead, three hundred interminable seconds, during which the conviction

that their own days were numbered thrilled them to the core. Each, on leaving the room, allowed a faint sigh of relief to escape from his or her lips, and each—although not one would have admitted it for the world—was sensible of a diffusive satisfaction that poor George had been taken first. And this seemed eminently fitting, because the dear man had never really been part and parcel of his parish. Always they had regarded him as an alien, almost an interloper, for everybody knew that during four successive generations Hernshaw Rectory had been filled by a Mottisfont. In Alicia's lifetime it had been different; but after her demise George had certainly neglected his duty in allowing a mere chit of a girl to become the absolute mistress of his house, and within a few months the autocrat of the parish.

Miss Priscilla ventured to remind her brother that it might be well, when bestowing the living upon the next incumbent, to stipulate expressly that girls' hockey-clubs should be discouraged, and that good, wholesome doctrine should be preached from the pulpit. The aunts hinted vaguely at one especial doctrine markedly ignored by George Vennable, that of everlasting punishment, which in Mottisfontian mouths had indeed been a rod wherewith to scourge the sinful and thoughtless.

Of course, Joy divined what engrossed the thoughts of the ladies. She knew that the past five-and-twenty years were regarded by

them as an interregnum; she felt, with a shudder of revulsion, that before her father was out of the house they were busy fitting a different sort of man into it, one of the sound, "cocksure" type, like the very superior person who had married Arabella Mottisfont, he who was destined to become a Colonial Bishop.

It goes without saying that in their niece's presence the aunts were careful to speak no word that might be construed as a slight upon the dead. All Mottisfont's speak well of the dead, or, in exceptional cases, say nothing. The aunts made a lamentable mistake in saying too much. Well-meaning but not quite sincere praise was as nauseating for Joy to swallow as the Gregory's powder which her mother had administered to her when a child. Much against her wish — although she had uttered but the faintest of protests — the aunts were sleeping at the Rectory, and, very properly, they insisted upon their niece taking due nourishment at regular hours. Their appetite for plain food never failed on these unhappy occasions, although each lady made it a point of honour to eat what was set before her — and this applied more particularly to second helpings — with an air of mournful detachment, and in silence. Joy wanted to talk and eat nothing.

"But, my child," Miss Priscilla would observe, "you must take something. This sole is excellent, and so easily digested."

"No, thank you, Aunt Priscilla."

Miss Lavinia bleated feebly :

"If your poor father were here——"

"Of course he is here," said Joy firmly.

Miss Lavinia, quite unconsciously, allowed a pair of frightened pale blue eyes to wander in and out of corners. Miss Priscilla said with authority :

"Really, Joy, you go too far."

"I'm quite sure he's in this room now. He loved this room. When we were alone we always sat here and had our beyondy talks."

"Beyondy talks? I never heard of such an adjective."

"Talks beyond the veil, if you like. Father didn't believe that death whirled us asunder. He held that the spirit lingered for a time at least with those it loved. Why, only a fortnight ago he told me to look after his collections, because he should be so uneasy if the moth got into them."

"Good gracious me!" ejaculated poor Miss Lavinia.

At once Joy closed her lips, conscious that she had been an idiot to let herself go in this intimate strain to persons whose ideas and associations were as remote as the fixed stars from her own. Miss Priscilla closed the discussion for ever by saying in a glacial tone :

"These things have not been revealed unto us."

The day before the funeral the all-important

subject of Joy's future was introduced by Miss Priscilla. In justice to the aunts, it must be understood that they were anxious to do the right thing. Nor must it be forgotten, looking at the matter from Joy's point of view, that the aunts, by virtue of years and experience, claimed the doubtful privilege of determining what the right thing was. Joy, of course, must live with them. This, let us admit frankly, involved sacrifices: the dislocation of habits sacrosanct in the eyes of elderly spinsters. Joy would bring dogs to the Lodge, and dogs—terrifying thought!—would certainly harass and perhaps slay cats. One could hardly expect so impetuous a creature to remember to wipe her feet carefully before entering the small hall with its immaculate carpet. Moreover, Joy's particular friends were not held in the highest esteem by the Misses Mottisfont.

However, they tackled valiantly the certainty of discomfort, and the probability of what Joy vulgarly called "ructions."

"My dear," Miss Priscilla said kindly, "your Aunt Lavinia and I will do our best to make up to you for what you have lost."

A faint smile flickered about Joy's lips and vanished. Not being inspired to say the appropriate word, she kissed her aunts in silence.

"You will come to us at your own convenience; but, speaking for myself and Aunt

Lavinia"—she glanced at Miss Lavinia, who nodded her head in approbation—"I say the sooner the better."

"You mean——" faltered Joy.

"That you must make your home with us."

Having spoken, Miss Priscilla folded her hands upon her lap.

Miss Lavinia did likewise, looking down her long nose. In her mind, which was not quite clear, as a rule, immediately after luncheon, was a confused vision of Joy's bull-terrier devouring her Maltese cat.

"You are very kind, but—but I can't do that."

"Can't?"

"I should drive you both wild inside of a week."

"We should have to bear and forbear on both sides," muttered Miss Lavinia. "About the dogs, for instance. Grip" (this was the terribly significant name of the bull-terrier): "well, we must ask you to let Grip sleep in a nice kennel outside the Lodge instead of in your bedroom."

"And one more thing, my dear child: I dare say you would forgo the pleasure of walking any more foxhound puppies."

"I can't come to you," said Joy resolutely.

What followed, which may be omitted, cannot be described as a row: "ruction," Joy's word, is the better. The aunts, being first

and last gentlewomen of a more dignified generation, abhorred rows. Both ladies would have sooner eaten pudding with a spoon, or spoken of a gown as a dress, or alluded to stays as corsets, than raise their voices in unseemly bickerings. Having exhausted their own arguments, they said, almost simultaneously: "We must lay this before your Uncle Giles."

"Please, please, don't!"

"It is our duty, child."

Sir Giles, magisterially, took the matter under serious consideration. After the funeral he escorted Joy back to the Rectory, and sat down beside her in the dismal drawing-room.

He had felt her hand trembling upon his arm, had seen the tears upon her cheeks, and he knew that his elder sisters, much as he respected them, were somewhat austere and hypercritical. In fact, during the progress of the service, and indeed at the very moment when the earth pattered upon George Venable's coffin, he had come to a momentous decision.

"Joy," he said, in his rumbling voice, "my poor child, you don't want to live with your aunts."

This revelation of perceptive powers and sympathies, hitherto unsuspected, filled Joy with amazement. In her surprise she seized her uncle's arm, and exclaimed:

"How did you guess that? Uncle, I can't live with them. Their ways are not my ways. I—I should die of suffocation in that prim, tiny house."

The prim, tiny house belonged to Sir Giles, and he didn't like to hear it disparaged, but he continued very kindly:

"Yes, yes, yes. To be sure—to be sure! We won't go into that—eh? No, no. You have been mistress here, my dear, and, all in all, a very competent little mistress, too." He patted her hand, keeping it in his own. "'Pon my soul! I've had better dinners here than in my own house. Now, what do you say to coming to the Park and looking after—me?"

Joy gasped.

"You are quite overcome," said Sir Giles magnificently, "but I mean it."

He had the air of a monarch conferring, unexpectedly, some tremendous honour like the Order of the Golden Fleece.

"Oh! oh!"

"Be calm, child. I'm not speaking on impulse, and I propose to give you, within—er—reasonable limits, a free hand. You are a capital housekeeper. I shall deliver to you—the keys."

He spoke very solemnly. To him, poor fellow, they were the keys of the only heaven he knew.

"Uncle—oh! what shall I say?—you will

think me so ungrateful, but I can't. It's impossible.

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Sir Giles.

He wiped his forehead with a large bandana handkerchief; his eyes were popping out of his head; his lower lip quivered pendulously. Then light was vouchsafed him.

"This has been too much for you," he pronounced. "You are not yourself, child."

She sprang up. The colour flowed to her cheeks, the brown flecks danced in her blue eyes. What had been so conspicuously absent during the past week—youth, energy, vitality—flamed and flared.

"Uncle," she panted, "it is because I am myself, and because I have been brought up differently to other girls, that I can't stay here, either with the aunts or with you. I thought I loved Hernshaw, and in a sense I do, but I loved it because he was here. And now he has gone, I must go too. His place must be filled. I know that, but I," her voice grew defiant, "I shall hate the man who fills it. I should hate him if he were one of the twelve apostles——"

"You are raving! I—er—I don't hold you responsible. Perhaps you ought to go to your room and lie down. I wonder if a glass of port wine——"

"Uncle, you must hear me out. It's best to be honest, even if it hurts. You have done me a great honour, but if—if I were like other

girls, if I could settle quietly down in Hershaw, still something stands between you and me."

"Something between you and me?"

She saw now that he was taking her seriously: that her greater vitality imposed itself upon his mind.

"Yes; I can't forgive you for being the cause of the diphtheria."

"Heavens and earth!"

"You refused to spend a few pounds upon those sties. You deliberately refused, knowing what was at stake."

He was so confounded that he stammered out an excuse.

"I told you I hadn't the money."

"The sale of one picture, one cabinet, some of the old silver, a few trees, would have put things in order. Because of that I can't live with you."

His voice shook a little as he answered. In a moment anger, righteous wrath, would shake his whole body, and the room as well, but as yet he was too dazed to take in fully the tremendous audacity of this indictment. Like all feeble-minded persons, he trifled with details.

"Sell a picture?" he repeated, with almost piteous interrogation. "Such things are not done. You are crazy. As for the sties—if you had seen old Pundle's!"

"I have seen them. You all think he is one

of the right sort. I'd like to see him eat-o'-nine-tailed."

"You are a very impertinent young woman."
"I suppose I am. Yes; I must be. But the truth had to come out. Because I won't live fatly among abuses that I'm powerless to wipe out of existence, I must go away."

Sir Giles rose, shaking a minatory forefinger.
"Go and be——"

He pulled himself up just in time; and his self-control, curiously enough, had a reflex action upon Joy. Her air of authority vanished, the ring went out of her voice, the rigidity from her limbs. She became in an instant the feminine creature who sat on a stool at her father's knee, dependent upon love and kindness.

"Uncle, forgive me! I had no right to speak like that. And to-day of all days! Oh, it was awful! And it's not for me to judge you——"

"I should think not, indeed."

Sir Giles was slightly mollified, but still outraged to the marrow.

"Or Admiral Pundle. I'm a beast. It is I who ought to be whipped."

"Come, come," he spoke mildly, seeing the tears streaming down her cheeks, and her heaving bosom, "we Mottisfont's have a temper. You are distraught. And I spoke at an inopportune moment. A night's rest, yes, yes—— And we'll forget everything that has been said about——about those confounded sties."

He was about to bustle out when Joy stopped him with a gesture. She realised that he misapprehended entirely the nature of her apology.

"Uncle Giles, I've behaved shamefully, but you understand that I must leave Hernshaw, don't you?"

He turned on the threshold.

"And where, pray, are you going?"

"I mean to travel—see the world!"

"See the world? Alone?"

"Thousands of women younger than I do it."

"Good-bye, Joy. I can't discuss this temperately with you to-day; but as your natural protector, your—natural—protector," he gave the substantive a sonorous, full-mouthed enunciation, "I will say a word or two more—tomorrow."

With that he escaped.

Next day she set out about her preparations for leaving the Rectory.

Later, Miss Priscilla said to her, pointedly:

"We thought at one time that you and Esmé Burgess——"

"That was never possible."

"We wondered at his not coming to the funeral."

"He wrote. There was a big political meeting somewhere. I quite understood."

But here she fibbed, being sore that the young fellow should have stayed away. Her father had been so kind to him, so hospitable

in the old days. And if he had come as a friend, he would have been very welcome.

She was distressed, too, because Frank Tisdale held aloof. Attending the funeral, why had he slipped away immediately afterwards? Perhaps he saw her alone with her uncle, and did not like to intrude. She would be sorry to say "good-bye" to Frank Tisdale.

She was thinking of writing him a letter asking him to come over when she heard the familiar toot of his motor outside the Rectory gate. A moment later the parlourmaid ushered him into the dining-room, already dismantled. In her plain black dress, unrelieved by any touch of white, she looked pale and thin. When Tisdale gazed into her eyes she turned them aside, as if afraid that he might read something in their too-transparent depths. Immediately she began to talk of her plans, speaking in a quick, emphatic tone, as if she were wearied to tears of protest and advice.

"I am going to travel for a few months. Pragson will take care of the dogs, and I am storing my furniture with him. You know I have five hundred a year. I'm quite rich."

"When do you go?"

"As soon as I can. There is going to be a sale of the furniture I don't value. The aunts are furious, and Uncle Giles has pronounced sentence: I am not a Mottisfont. And yet," for the first time she laughed, "you see that

I survive. Sit down! Smoke if you like; it may calm my nerves. I let myself go with you, because I dare not talk freely with them. You are a friend. It is good to have such a friend."

"I'm glad you realise that."

"Why didn't you come before? You're always horribly busy, still——"

"I thought that at first——"

She interrupted him impetuously.

"It's at first that we want a friend. After the funeral, when I came back to this room——" She paused, and in a firmer voice continued: "Well, you are here, and I can thank you for all your kindness." She put out both her hands, which he took and held. Then she whispered softly: "I don't regret the end came so swiftly; he wished it so. Several times he spoke of you. 'He's a good fellow, Frank Tisdale; a capital fellow. I should have liked to have had a son like Frank Tisdale.' Can't you hear him saying it?"

"Yes."

He held her hands tighter, looking hungrily into her face.

"It meant a great deal from him."

"Perhaps it meant more than you think, Joy."

He had never called her by her Christian name before.

"Eh?"

"You see, your father was a diplomat, and

he could handle men and women as delicately as he handled butterflies. I'm sure he knew that I would give the world to have the right to call myself his son. Joy, let me take care of you! Come and share my life!" His voice trembled oddly. "I'll be so good to you. And there'll be so much for you to do. You don't mind a fight? You aren't afraid of work?"

He drew her towards him, but she resisted. With a sigh he released her. Tears were in her eyes and in her voice when she said:

"I wish I could, but I can't—I can't. And now," her voice broke, "I have lost you, too."

"No, no," he whispered.

She turned and went to the mantelpiece, leaning her elbow upon it, showing her fine, delicately-cut profile. After a pause, she said slowly, in a firm voice:

"If we are to remain friends, I must tell you something. It will hurt you, but it will make our friendship possible in the future. Sit down and don't look at me."

He sat down.

"I loved a man who was not worthy," she murmured, so low that he could hardly catch the words. "Don't ask me any questions, please."

"It isn't necessary," said Tisdale. "You are telling me what I know already."

She gave a cry of astonishment.

"You—know?"

"Yes."

She did not speak for a few moments, trying to rally her powers, wondering what he knew and how much. Tisdale said nervously:

"Now that the ice is broken, I can mention something else. When Charteris," at his name she turned her head entirely, "was asked by you to come to the Rectory, he wanted to tell you who he was."

"Why didn't he?"

"I prevented him."

"You prevented him?"

She repeated the phrase. Tisdale gave his reasons rather haltingly; then, as she said nothing, he added, with a gesture of deprecation:

"You must remember that he believed you were engaged to Esmé Burgess."

With her face still hidden she asked another question.

"You and he have talked this over. When?"

"Last night."

She turned.

"Last night?"

"Yes."

Her face, white and piteous, flashed upon him. He could see that she scented mystery, that her instinct, ever alert, was ready to swoop upon every word he uttered and tear the truth out of it. In a moment she would exact details.

He had come here on the impulse of the moment to test her and himself before he gave to Charteris his final answer. He had said to himself that Charteris' proposed sacrifice would be largely thrown away if Joy had cast him out of her heart, or if she hinted, directly or indirectly, at the possibility of friendship warming into a deeper sentiment. Then he heard her voice as if from a distance.

"Where is Mr. Charteris now?"

"I have come to tell you about that."

His throat was dry, and he had to moisten his lips with his tongue. She perceived at once that he was in distress.

"Has anything happened to him?"

"He engaged a passage on the *Luna*, which sailed yesterday at midnight."

"I understand. He has gone away. Did," again she averted her head, "did he tell you that he had written to me?"

"Yes. He showed me the letter you sent in reply. Because of that, because I had heard from his own lips that there was no chance for him, I ventured to hope that there might be a small chance for me."

She did not answer, but the slightly bowed back, the forlorn droop of her head moved him profoundly. Somehow her air, her attitude conveyed the sense of a poignant isolation. He moved nearer. Suddenly, to his surprise, she straightened herself, lifting her head and

confronting him. She spoke with increasing vehemence, as if trying to palliate her conduct to herself rather than to Tisdale:

"If he had run away with that woman, I could have forgiven him. But to stay on in her husband's house, his companion, his friend. Oh, how shameful! How abominable! And it went on for years! He is right to go away. He ought never to come back."

"Perhaps he never will come back."

Something in his tone challenged her attention. Tisdale continued in the same nervous, slightly monotonous voice:

"He told me last night that he had lost nearly all his money."

"Lost his money! How?"

"On the Stock Exchange."

"Gambling!"

Evidently this piece of intelligence aroused contempt, not pity, for she spoke in a hard voice. And yet, a moment later, as if the implied censure had affected speaker rather than listener, she continued in a softer tone:

"Being a man, you think in your heart that real love ought to be able to pardon anything?"

She spoke interrogatively, appealing to his judgment, because she mistrusted her own, which hitherto—as she knew—had never failed her. Suddenly he perceived the issues at stake. Like Charteris, he had thought of Joy Vennable as a woman with certain masculine attributes.

Only masculine in the sense that the enormous majority of women are without them. He admired her self-reliance, poise, executive ability, and, within limits, her freedom from convention, or, rather, her power of stepping bravely outside the circle of Mottisfontian tradition. It had not occurred to him that these qualities were artificial rather than natural: the result of an adored father's inability to play a part for which he had been wrongly cast. Now he saw her relaxed in mind and body, plastic, and the more alluring because her weakness solicited so subtly his strength. Hope animated him again. Here was the woman not able to stand alone, not able to resist importunity, who, sooner or later, would fall gladly into protecting arms.

He perceived much more than this.

He had read her aright when he contended that she belonged to that large army of women who do not marry unless they can marry the man they love. If Joy realised that Hugo Charteris was not unworthy of her love, believing him dead, she would remain single all her life. On the other hand, if she persuaded herself, or was persuaded by another, that her love had been bestowed upon the baser sort, she would try to cast that love from her. And then, heartwhole, she might be wooed and won.

At this moment, worn out by suffering, bewildered and forlorn, she entreated his judg-

ment, and would accept it as final. And so little was required: a careless shrug of the shoulder, the uplifted brow, the derisive smile. She would know then that if pride constrained him to decent silence concerning a rival, such silence could only be interpreted to mean reprobation.

These thoughts fluttered like homing-pigeons into his mind as he heard Joy saying:

"I loved the man who worked here with us; I loathed the man who behaved so brazenly at the trial."

"You loved a creature of your imagination?"

"I suppose so," she spoke grudgingly. "The other was contemptible. How could I have loved him? How could I?"

"You repeat that because you are not sure?"

The blood flew to her cheeks.

She faltered:

"If you knew how I have struggled——"

"I can guess," he replied. "It's not easy to cast out angels or devils, when once they are in possession."

"You seem to see into my mind. If it is a devil that is tearing me, I can cast it out, and I will. Why don't you help me? Why do you stare at me so strangely?"

His face worked. And then the innumerable little acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice, the hardships patiently endured, the long hours of



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tireless ministrations to others, the fine thoughts and aspirations which had nourished his mind, these, ten thousand strong, rose up and stood by him.

"Why do I look at you so strangely?" He sprang from his seat, laid his hands upon her shoulders, and gazed deep into her eyes. "Because I am tempted to lie. Because I would give my right hand to be able to tell you that Hugo Charteris is a devil, and that you ought to cast him out for ever and ever. And this I can't do. He came to me last night and showed me his heart. He abominated what he had done. If he was unclean, and he would be the last to deny it, he is now clean. His love for you has worked that miracle. He is leaving England because the old life has become detestable. That is the truth—I swear it!"

"Thank God!" said Joy.

"You have been miserable," said Tisdale, almost with violence, "because you felt ashamed of your love—abased. You thought, perhaps, that he was amusing himself at your expense? And behind everything else was that woman, that sorceress, who has gone back to her husband."

"What do you say?"

"Didn't you know? And the husband was never his friend. That was the straw out of which McAllister made his bricks. And at the trial Charteris said nothing because he chose to shoulder the blame. You loved the man

who worked here with us, who was always kind and cheery and strong. And that was the real man, the true Hugo Charteris. You made no mistake in loving him."

"If I could be sure of that," she whispered.

"I can prove it," he answered slowly. "I told you just now that Charteris took passage on the *Luna*."

"Yes?"

She gazed at him fearfully, divining some tragedy.

"The *Luna* was cut in two last night by a big liner, but Charteris was not on board her. He missed the boat because he came to my flat to get the last news of you."

"Oh!"

The look on her face, never to be forgotten, set at rest for ever any doubt he might have entertained as to the exact nature of her feelings for the man she loved.

Then, very curtly, he told the rest of the story.

Joy returned to Easthampton with Tisdale. Hugo was in the sitting-room, when the door opened. Joy entered alone. She closed the door, and stood with her back against it, confronting him. He stared at her, apprehending for the moment only one thing: that Tisdale had betrayed his confidence. Having made up his mind to be as one dead, this enforced resurrection caused acute pain.

"Tisdale told you?"

"Everything."

The all-embracing word, however, conveyed but little to a mind inherently obstinate and combative.

"I couldn't have believed it possible."

At this she perceived how greatly he had misjudged his friend. She advanced nearer.

"You have come to say good-bye?"

"I have come to ask a question. Is it true that you want to give everything up because I told you to begin again?"

"Yes; never was better advice."

"And you really mean to disappear, to let your own people believe you dead?"

"The gain to them would be greater than the loss."

He answered doggedly, lifting his head and thrusting forward his chin, as if seeking to impress upon her the futility of argument. Then she smiled, very faintly, as she held out her hand, and said softly:

"But if *I* ask you to live?"

They sailed for Australia, a fortnight afterwards, man and wife. Tisdale's was the last face they saw on English land. The Mottisfont's bade Joy "God speed" with emotions compounded of relief, exasperation, and a certain shocked surprise. Sir Giles told his sisters that no happiness could be expected from the union of his niece with a gambler and

profligate. His putting "gambler" first is not without significance for the student of upper-class life in England. Had Hugo kept his large income, the other word might have been suppressed. Much is forgiven to those who have much.

As the big ship swung slowly into the stream, Tisdale waved his handkerchief. He stood slightly apart from the crowd, his thin figure clearly outlined against the white wall of the huge dock. Above and beyond stretched the myriad chimneys of the town wherein he had laboured, and would labour, so strenuously. Hugo turned to Joy.

"You ought to be standing by that good fellow's side," he muttered.

She pressed his arm.

"But you want me most," she whispered tenderly.

THE END







